Chrome Shelled Regios Volume13

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These are novel illustrations that were included in volume 13

雨木シュウスケ
●あまぎしゅうすけ

第15回ファンタジア長編小説大賞佳作「マテリアルナイト　少女は巨人と踊る」でデビュー。広島県在住。東京、大阪、博多、札幌とサイン会に来てくださったみなさん、ありがとうございました！　差し入れやお手紙をくださった方、本当にありがとうございます！　各地の美食や頂いた差し入れをうまうま食っていたら……体重がやばいんだぜ。みんなも気をつけるんだぜ。

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鋼殻のレギオス13
グレー・コンチェルト

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鋼殻のレギオス13
グレー・コンチェルト

リーリンの右目は知っている。

この先の道がどこへ続こうとしているのかを。

ただ進めばいい。そうすれば――レイフォンは、かかわらずにすむ。

グレンダンに帰ってきたリーリンは、自律型移動都市、そして電子精霊の原初ともいえる存在と邂逅する。一方ニーナは、天剣授受者ティグリスの孫であるクラリーベルと出会い、グレンダンの奥へと誘われる。そしてレイフォンは、フェリやシャーニッドと共に、二人の奪還のためグレンダンへと侵入を果たすが――。

槍殻都市グレンダン――奥の院。そこで、何が待つのか？　自律型移動都市の深淵に潜む過酷な運命に向かい、歯車が動き出す！

ファンタジア文庫
雨木シュウスケ作品集

マテリアルナイト　少女は巨人と踊る
マテリアルナイトII 少女は聖霊と歌う
マテリアルナイトIII 少女は蒼剣と語る
マテリアルナイトIV 少女は世界と歩む
マテリアルナイトV そして少女は慈しむ

鋼殻のレギオス
鋼殻のレギオス 2 サイレント・トーク
鋼殻のレギオス 3 センチメンタル・ヴォイス
鋼殻のレギオス 4 コンフィデンシャル・コール
鋼殻のレギオス 5 エモーショナル・ハウル
鋼殻のレギオス 6 レッド・ノクターン
鋼殻のレギオス 7 ホワイト・オペラ
鋼殻のレギオス 8 ミキシング・ノート
鋼殻のレギオス 9 ブルー・マズルカ
鋼殻のレギオス 10 コンプレックス・デイズ
鋼殻のレギオス 11 インパクト・ガールズ
鋼殻のレギオス 12 ブラック・アラベスク
鋼殻のレギオス 13 グレー・コンチェルト

「過酷な
運命を選んだ
三つの子たち……」
鋼殻のレギオス
CHROME SHELLED REGIOS
13 グレー・コンチェルト

「やっぱり、あなたは
最高です」

「あなた程度に
時間をかけている暇はないんだ」

全身から吹き出された剄が天を突く。
グレンダンとツェルニ、
二つの都市の端から端まで疾走した。

カリアンは手紙を開いた。
長旅の間に紙片に染み込んだ
様々なにおいの他に、
かすかな花のような香りが
鼻孔をくすぐった。

Prologue

Why did he think of that event? It was a memory that shouldn't have existed. The memory of that time shouldn't have remained. Because all that were etched in that memory were simple anxiety and feelings. Hunger. Fear. Exhaustion. Unpleasantry.

His heart eased.

As he walked to the outskirt of the city, he absently pondered on the feelings welling up in him. That feeling was that of a child's. Though it did not recall the memory itself, it was a reaction only children cared for in an orphanage have. The more complicated meaning in that reaction would also show itself on the surface. The memory that shouldn't be recalled knotted in Layfon's heart.

What was the meaning of this feeling? The memory that he had never recalled was now dug out. Exactly what meaning did it hold ? What was the meaning behind the thing that he now thought of?

Layfon pondered as he kept walking.

Grendan stood before him. It was a place he lived in the past. The place called home. But he did not feel nostalgic. All he felt was tension from the gloomy atmosphere and the many difficulties he was to face and make happen. A tension that he felt like vomiting out.

"Layfon....." Felli called.

He turned around.

"You, okay?"

"Yeah."

He didn't have the room to smile. He felt gloominess in Felli's usual icy expression. The problem behind such a heavy atmosphere was probably because he looked ready to face a serious situation.

He could think step by step. Step by one step.

"Felli.... If it's you, you could support us even in Zuellni, so....."

"You want to kick me away again?"

He wanted to say more but stopped.

"I've already decided to go with you. No matter what happens to me, that would be my responsibility."

"But no one wants to see you caught in an accident."

"....."

"Everyone will be sad."

"....."

"Besides, it's not possible to escape Delbone's eyes in Grendan. The fight will probably begin the minute we enter the city."

"....."

"If things turned out like that, it'd already be hard enough to keep myself above water. If Sharnid-senpai.....!!"

A spark flashed past his mind.

The cause originated from his left leg.

"......I said I'd kick you."

"......You did, but."

Layfon moaned on the floor. It really hurt.

"I've also thought of ways to counter that Psychokinesist. Isn't that natural? Who do you think I am? Though I'm listless, I'm still talented."

"..... What incredible self-confidence."

"What are you two doing?" Sharnid said. He had returned to the two who had stopped walking.

"Because this fool is still unable to decide."

"Ahha? Saying those things again? You really are cautious."

"No, it's because....."

"Felli and I already knew for a long time that those people are monsters. Even so, we're going. Isn't it natural to have the appropriate strategies and fortitude for it?"

"..... Eh?"

"You grew up in the city opposite us, didn't you? Then you should understand this more than us. Simple bravado cannot win against those guys."

At a loss, Layfon looked at Grendan, then at Sharnid, who looked unhappy.

"Youth is our privilege. Even though it does nothing against those guys, we're still going. Though a newborn calf doesn't fear a tiger, we aren't confusing vigorous youth with rashness."

"Senpai....."

"Though we've been living, thinking ourselves clever, this time, it's our chance to show them the power of youth."

He laughed mockingly.

"Look, all your brain thinks are of cool lines."

"No no, isn't this the time suitable for such lines?"

"Well, never mind. You're different from a certain fool."

"Really. That guy probably doesn't have any plans like us."

"That's troublesome. Would he be the one to drag our feet?"

"Hoho, that's possible. Very possible. We valiantly save the crying Layfon. That would be the climax of the drama."

"No, uh....."

"That's how things are."

"Eh?" Felli said to Layfon, who looked confused.

"We aren't making a challenge without strategies. We move for victory. So please keep in mind that you're to act in order to come back alive."

Come back alive. What heavy words. At the same time, these heavy words gradually chased away the other pressure in his heart , as if liquids of different weight being poured into the same container.

"I understand."

"Good. Really, why do you have to waste time thinking of it when we're already here?"

"Um, sorry."

"..... All right, let's go."

Felli walked ahead on her own. Sharnid snorted a smile as he watched her back. Felli's foot started searching for its target, and he quickly escaped the kicking range.

A scene of heading for school.

"..... I really can't win against them."

Naturally, a smile appeared on his face. Layfon stood up and chased after them. That memory awoke once more in his mind. A memory from when he was young. A memory that shouldn't have remained. During his sweet slumber, he reached out his hand and touched something. He reflexively grabbed hold of it, and what came to him was a soft touch. Beside him was an existence similar to him. That was the feeling he had. The child sank into an even sweeter sleep. That feeling of comfort had remained with him until he turned into an adult and held the Heaven's Blade.

It was then again taken away when he left Grendan.

But once more, he wanted to return to the starting line.

Leerin. The child who was taken into the orphanage like him. That feeling must be from her. Now she had left his side again. She left him through her own volition. Were her words during that time genuine? Did she lie so to save him from a hopeless situation?

He must confirm it.

Layfon decided to strive forward.

A figure dropped down before them. This took place one minute after.

Cadenza Road Itto: Part 1

A faint blue dimness pervaded the surroundings.

A stone without any taint. Its surface was transparent like a mirror, reflecting the faint light like water. No one knew where the light came from. Or perhaps, the wall itself was releasing this faint light? But the light was not enough to chase away the darkness. Light and dark combined to create this special faintly blue gloom. It made a person feel like he was swimming in moonlight.

"This is?"

Words seeded with doubt echoed faintly. The sound rippled in the dimness. The surroundings stirred.

"This is the inner court of Grendan," Alsheyra said in a low voice behind her.

Alsheyra reached out a hand behind Leerin. Unlike before, that long and elegant finger guided Leerin's gaze. A hand that had been decorated. The decorations adorning her hand sparkled lightly in the darkness. It was also a strong hand. The hand of a guardian who was stronger than any Military Artists in Grendan.

The door.

It didn't look any different than the wall. But there was nothing behind them here, so Leerin understood this was the door.

The door was in front of her.

No, it existed here.

Alsheyra continued her narrative. Synola, the person who went to school together with Leerin was in fact the Queen who governed Grendan. Facts were always accompanied with an element of surprise. Leerin was surprised at that time too. But she had already seen through it before the disguise came off. Leerin's right eye had seen through Synola to the real identity that was Alsheyra Almonise.

"Inside this place is the person who is connected to the beginning of the world. She is the prototype of all Electronic Fairies. She lived in the very first Regios. She is the first guardian to the human race. All Electronic Fairies are copies of her. That way of putting it might be more suitable."

Alsheyra's explanation was meaningless. It was both wrong and right. Leerin's right eye knew.

That person was connected to the creation of the world. That person had been reborn in order to guard the human race. However, that wasn't her wish. She was anticipating the person who had helped her regain her lost identity. She lived till now to wait for his reappearance. In fact, she didn't care about the fate of this world. All she prayed for was his safe return.

He was the true owner of Leerin's right eye. What lived in Leerin's body was just his shadow. And the origin of that shadow was.....

"Is it really all right?" Alsheyra said.

Leerin thought of her words.

"Since what will happen next wouldn't be that bad. The worst situation might not occur during our lifetimes. There's no need to go past this door and no need to know the truth. Even so, do you still want to?"

The knot in Leerin's heart tightened at that question.

"......Don't you understand?"

"Huh?"

"Do you not understand anything? Things might begin in the next moment. The shadow might swap with the real body. If that doesn't happen, what about next time? It might happen soon! Isn't that so?"

"Yes, I don't deny that. Things are starting to move, but I don't know at what speed. The flow of time in the two sides might differ . Perhaps, while we're making our preparations, a hundred years might have flowed past."

".....I don't know. Didn't we just arrive here?"

"Yes. Either way, we don't know."

"That's why we should do our best in the present."

"That's the right choice. But is it really all right?"

Alsheyra's repeated question stabbed Leerin's heart. The question stabbed deeper than the initial question, making it hard to breathe.

"......Why, why are you asking?"

"What we need now is the "correct choice" that everyone can accept. Isn't that so?"

"....."

"What we need now is also the "correct choice" of your feelings. Right?"

Leerin clutched her chest tightly, feeling the pain, making herself accept Alsheyra's words. She did it because they were words she wanted to hear and words she couldn't disobey. But the temptation in the words and the pain both landed in her heart. She was determined to untie that knot in her.

Perhaps that was the truth.

No, she already knew what the "right" choice was. But she couldn't accept it, and she couldn't be persuaded. She didn't even know how things would turn out if she took action.

"So I....."

Once more, she took a step out. Facing the wall, she walked close to the door.

"I knew from birth that this day would come, so I could walk this path without confusion. But Lee-chan's different. The sudden realization, the sudden involvement. It's okay as you only learned now of the burden of fate you carry. No one would blame you. I wouldn't blame you."

".....Thanks."

But Leerin's steps did not cease. She would just keep on walking. That way.....It didn't matter.

Nina Antalk slept. The golden goat was near her. Sparkling light exuded from it as it waited for the timing from not too far away, watching her.

Where is this place?

It wasn't a real place. At least, it wasn't some place she was familiar with. Not Zuellni. Not Schneibel. An alien place.

This wasn't a real place because Nina knew she was sleeping.

The Haikizoku. Only he was watching her.

"You are....."

She tried to get closer, but the goat retreated at the same speed. She didn't see him moving though. Perhaps this was the distance of the mind between her and the goat. That was what a dream was , which meant she was still sleeping. There was nothing here. Everywhere was dark. Nina and the Haikizoku floated in the darkness. Time flowed. The two kept silent. No, did time exist? No matter how long one was in a dream, only a few seconds would pass in reality. Time in a dream was meaningless. In that case, perhaps the silence between them hadn't been a long one. But it felt long to Nina.

She wanted to say something. The silence made her uneasy.

"What is your name?"

The goat that had kept still like a statue finally moved. Its body shook lightly.

"As an Electronic Fairy, you were once a city's consciousness? I saw it. That was your city, wasn't it? Then you should have a name ."

"I've become the blade of revenge. A name means nothing. I only desire for the person who will use me and the person who can use my power."

"You mean me?"

"For now, I look at you to see whether you can complete the blade of revenge or as the flame of hatred, turn me into a blazing flame. Or turn my face into that of a person who is like a beast of ill-omen. I will keep looking."

"Who are your enemies?"

She knew of the Haikizoku's power when it was on a rampage. That information she had obtained from Haia. Changed by its hatred for those who had destroyed its city, the Haikizoku had transformed into a dangerous power that could be lent to a Military Artist, and its target was the filth monsters. The Haikizoku had caused the Academy City to go on a rampage, and it had entered Nina's body. If she didn't have Zuellni's help, she wouldn't be able to suppress its power. After that, she had come to the city of Myath and was involved in the fight against the Wolf Faces. To put it another way, a certain huge power had made her fight them.

This might be connected to Dixerio. While preventing the Wolf Faces' plan from coming into fruition, Nina had been dragged into this thing that was connected to Dixerio.

But that might also be wrong. Dixerio might not be the cause of her movement to Myath. Perhaps the overlapping of the two of them had caused a simultaneous movement. Perhaps this had occurred for the first time since the Haikizoku's power entered her body.

"The negative substance that wishes for this world's destruction. The person who spreads it. The people who want to bring their ideals into reality. I belong to this world. I exist in this world. It's natural for me to battle and bet on this world's existence."

"The Wolf Faces too."

"Of course."

"Just what are they?"

"....."

"They are planning something, that I can tell. It must be something bad. Those guys don't care for the deaths of Electronic Fairies and their cities. I understand we must defeat them, but I don't know what they're doing."

"....." The Haikizoku was silent.

"I don't know why they do what they do. You know, don't you? Then tell me."

"....." The Haikizoku was silent.

"Tell me. I don't know. I know nothing about the enemies. " Something bad" isn't an explanation I can accept."

"....." The Haikizoku remained silent.

What was the meaning behind that silence? "Tell me everything. Who are we fighting? What is the point of it? I want to know what other threats there are to this world other than the filth monsters."

"I know your anger."

That was the battle in Zuellni against the giants. The sound of Military Artists who craved for battle rose and fell. It was a hopeless and hated scene for the Haikizoku. He cursed his impotence. As a city's consciousness that worked to protect humans, he had failed to take up his responsibility.

This scene hammered home his impotence.

The Haikizoku managed to live by feeding on his despair. It searched for a Military Artist it could entrust its power to battle the filth monsters, the Wolf Faces and the unknown enemies to this world. He ended up living in Nina's body. Even so, why didn't he tell her everything?

".....I too, I've sighed at my impotence."

Nina put a hand on her chest, recalling the pain in her memory. This memory started from Schneibel. She had failed to save the little Electronic Fairy. After that, she had come to Zuellni to train herself. But she still felt powerless even though she was in Zuellni. A loss in the previous Military Arts Competition had left Zuellni short of supplies.

"We cannot lose next time. We must win in the next Military Arts Competition." She had kept training while holding this belief. In order to strengthen her resolve, she had left team 14 to start her own 17th platoon. She had invited Sharnid, who had left team 10, to join her. Later on, the Student President had recommended Felli. Harley had become the platoon's Dite technician, and the platoon had started its activities despite its low member count.

Nina had felt uneasy. Perhaps her first step was wrong. Perhaps it was wrong to strengthen her resolve under those circumstances. They didn't have any outstanding fighting power, nor did they have any brilliant tactics. Perhaps it was more correct to work under the captain of the 14th platoon and let him draw out her potential. That unease had always occupied her heart. Perhaps she should disband the platoon. That thought had come to her again and again, but she had stomached all the weaknesses of the team.

At last, Layfon appeared.

His existence was so bright. His power drew Nina in the right direction. Though there were many accidents, they had finally won in the intercity match with Myath. Zuellni was released from its situation. Though this wasn't the last Military Arts Competition, if this kept on going, Zuellni probably wouldn't lose.

Zuellni had been released from its crisis. But what did Nina gain? Was it good to have formed the 17th platoon? What had the platoon that reflected her will have offered in the battle? Did everything else become meaningless as long as Layfon was here?

"I actually didn't do anything. Aren't I still a meaningless and powerless existence? Haikizoku, you chose to live in my body. But that power is yours. I'm just a tool to manifest your power. As I thought, I'm still powerless. Is that why you aren't telling me anything?"

Her chest hurt. Her breathing hurt. She had left Schneibel for a certain goal. What had she achieved now? She was jealous of Layfon, and she disliked herself for being unable to hate him. She must be very ugly.

What was she thinking when Karian reproached Layfon for relying on her as his reason to battle? What was she feeling when she fought the giants and was almost taken over by the Haikizoku? Was she here just because of her own willfulness?

".....You who comprehend your powerlessness."

The Haikizoku spoke as she sank into negative thought.

"You understand the heart of an Electronic Fairy. It was a correct choice to stay in your body. But your resolve is not enough. Perhaps you have experienced the hell of this world, but your resolve to strive for the future is not enough."

"I mean the resolve to keep fighting, you little Military Artist. You who have become my son."

This wasn't the Haikizoku's voice. A new existence was now in this darkness, in this incredible dream.

"You are....."

She sucked in a breath as she watched her. So beautiful. So unexpected. Looking from a human's perspective, her appearance stood on the fine line between beauty and ugliness. She had a human's form, but some parts were different. Wings took over her arms. Within her hair was a long feather like a bird's tail feather. Feathers grew on different parts of her body, and her feet were the claws of a bird's.

Half beast and half man.

"Schneibel?"

That was Schneibel that Nina had seen when she was little.

"Great mother," the Haikizoku called her.

A faint smile adorned Schneibel's face. She looked at the Haikizoku then surveyed her surroundings.

"Melnisc, I've made you carry a painful memory. You others, no need to hide. Show yourselves."

A change occurred. The world remained dark, but two more pictures appeared in the dark background.

It was a four-legged beast with long fur, and the other.....

"Zuellni?"

The Electronic Fairy that had grown after obtaining something from Falnir stood by Nina's side.

"The three children who have chosen a cruel fate. This is your first time gathered together?"

"As we're connected closely by En, no need for first time formalities," the four-legged beast said.

"Yes, Grendan. Though I'm connected to this girl, it's not so for others. This is the first meeting. It's a moment that is worth remembering."

Melnisc. Schneibel had said it. That must be the Haikizoku's name. And she had called the four-legged beast "Grendan". Lance Shelled City. Gorneo had said it before. There was another Electronic Fairy in Grendan. An existence that slept and was called the true will. So this four-legged beast represented the will of the sleeper. It was a Haikizoku that drove the movement of the Lance Shelled City.

And there was Zuellni, lowering her head unobtrusively beside Nina. Why did she appear with these two in here? Why did Schneibel say "The three children who have chosen a cruel fate"? What had Zuellni chosen?

"Grendan, has Saya awakened?" Schneibel said, ignoring the confused Nina.

"Not yet, but it's close. The person with the rose and cross crafted into her and the person who possesses great power have appeared."

"They should be in one body, but now it looks like it won't go so smoothly."

"Yes, but I don't know how things will progress in this situation. "

"The shadow has become two. Though that shouldn't have appeared, this is the first of many occurrences. We'll have to keep watching to see what happens next. What I'm worried about is just mere worry."

"Perhaps not, that's why we need to make preparations."

"As you said, and there's also Zuellni."

Schneibel's gaze turned to Zuellni. The tiny Electronic Fairy looked at the mother of all Electronic Fairies without fear.

"You, who have chosen to hide in the dimness, have seen everything. What has happened to her?"

Nina watched Zuellni. The Electronic Fairy that had never spoken opened her mouth. Though she had heard the Haikizoku – Melnisc's voice, she had never thought that other Electronic Fairies could speak. Zuellni could speak. What was her voice like?

Though this wasn't the time to notice that, it still bothered her.

"That person has not changed."

Zuellni's voice was gentle and healing.

"As in the past, an upright person."

"The same as the person that I know?"

Schneibel's voice also felt gentle.

"I'm not sure. I do not know the person that mother knows."

"Then, what do you feel about her?"

Zuellni crossed her arms and smiled at Nina. Nina thought of the meaning behind that smile. The conversation that was now taking place in darkness.....She thought about it and something suddenly flashed through her mind. Darkness. Only the girl whose beauty was like that of a temptress suited this word. Nina had thought the Haikizoku had left her body.....but the girl had returned Melnisc to her body.

She was the topic of this conversation in the dark.

"She's an upright person. She hasn't changed since our first meeting. What she likes, she likes. What she dislikes, she dislikes. She's clear about that."

"You really do like her," Schneibel said.

Zuellni smiled her usual smile. This was the Zuellni that Nina knew.

"So I'll put my full support behind her, and Nina too."

Though Zuellni tagged Nina onto her word, Nina was finally mentioned in the conversation.

"Um, and Grendan?"

"I've already obtained the information about that girl from you. Her temper and personality haven't changed. Though I don't think her virtues will change, since she's determined, this will become her new strength."

"Both of you have agreed, but the ultimate decision rests in your hand, Melnisc. You too, Nina Antalk. The children who are the knights protecting Schneibel."

Schneibel's gaze found Melnisc. The golden goat lowered its head.

"I....."

"You pitiful child who knows the will of destruction just as Grendan. You pitiful child who has been baptized in despair yet still lives strong. Why do you hesitate?"

"....."

"Is it because revenge burns in you still and you've seen that beast?"

"....."

"Is that it? But you can't become that beast, nor can you partially become him. Though you both have the same form, he lives a different existence. An Electronic Fairy that is not my son, that shouldn't exist in this world. No, he isn't an Electronic Fairy. He lives in the same dimension as Saya."

"....."

"Zuellni is clear about him too? The darkness you protect nurtures him. Do you know what that beast is doing?"

"I....."

"The fight with the Wolf Faces is as expected, since between them is a give and take relationship. But after that, where do the beast's fangs point? Where are they pointing at now? Do you know ?"

"....."

Zuellni fell silent. She looked troubled. At the same time, they seemed to be on alert.

"".....Unlike them who are closely tied by promises, we do not have a symbol. That's why we can't do as we please. In order to break free from the fate of waiting for the end of the legend, we cannot use the legend as our aim."

"The end of the legend.....?"

What did Schneibel mean? Was this what all Electronic Fairies wished for? No, just what was their aim? Wasn't the Haikizoku Melnisc's wish revenge?

"Zuellni.....?"

"....."

Nina looked at Zuellni, the first friend she met after arriving at the Academy City. But Zuellni remained silent.

This was a dream.

This was Nina's dream. That should be what it was.

But Nina failed to find a way to break this silence. She failed to wake from the dream.

He was in the dark.

"What? Isn't it already out?"

"Because isn't this more interesting?"

Dixerio took down the mask from his face as he watched the scenery beneath him. The mask disappeared as if melting into the air. It was a face like a beast's. One seemed to see huge fangs during the moment of its disappearance.

"Speaking of which, aren't you gonna explain what just happened? After all, I'm at your beck and call."

"Ala, isn't it normal for the hunting dog to obey its owner?"

"Tsk."

Dixerio left.

He stood on one of Grendan's multi-legs.

"Is this the first Regios of this world?"

"Yes. You've been here many times, haven't you?"

"Unpleasant things happened every time I visited. I never had the time to appreciate its scenery."

"But I think there are many familiar people to you here."

"I've already forgotten. They aren't worth remembering. Besides , they probably don't remember me."

"It's sad, being unable to become familiar."

The fierce wind blew Nelphilia's hair into curls, swaying her dress. Originally, Dixerio wouldn't let it go like that. He also didn't accept himself in the dark for being so unsightly.

"Are you letting loose the sadness in you?"

"You saw through it?"

"That's not like you."

"Fu~"

Bearing the strong wind, she looked at Grendan.

"Speaking of which, the prey has appeared."

"Then capture him, just as I wanted."

"And the girl?"

"Bring her along. She's my woman."

"Ah, when did it become that kind of relationship?"

"Since she interfered with my plan."

"So troublesome. She may be the one that Zuellni likes."

"Then I'll sing Zuellni a nursery rhyme."

"Really, you're already past that age."

"Then I can prepare her a doll."

"Ah, that's a headache."

The scenery was peaceful. The unusual event of contact with an Academy City had ended. Normal citizens had returned to their normal lives. That was the same for the Academy City too. Students had begun working hard to renew the desolate city. Though Grendan's citizens were still perplexed about the incident, they had given the immature students as much help as they could, trying to understand the situation in the other city while being banned from interacting with them.

What peaceful scenery. No one would know the next huge wave was about to hit. Everyone thought the rain had passed.

"So when is your hunt going to end?" Nelphilia's gaze moved from the city to Dixerio's back.

"Until I've hunted them all down. The saying goes, a dog boils a dead rabbit. This time, the hunter has become the prey."

The stirring of green Kei appeared around Dixerio as he replied. Green Kei. The flame of revenge. Though it had a low profile recently, it might be slowly waking up.

Her gaze shifted to the deep blue sky and saw the faint shadow of the moon.

"Perhaps it's coming close."

The moon appeared there all the time even though the sun continued to rise in the east and fall in the west.

"It seems your fangs are heavily damaged?"

"Then let new fangs be grown."

The Dite in his hand had not been restored. This was a new Dite given by Nelphilia. It was made of metal that would never shatter no matter how much Kei was poured into it. This Dite symbolized eternity as long as Nelphilia lived. However, at present, it was rusting. Not the Dite but Dixerio. To say it clearly, it was the fang living in his heart. The reason for the rust didn't stem from Dixerio or Nelphilia. His heart wasn't rusting. His skill was not either.

Yet the rusting never stopped. It continued to invade and swallow the depth of Dixerio's heart.

"Let's go."

Dixerio jumped into the city. It was his will to silently bear the destruction of his body.

"Perhaps it's a good thing for you."

She was very dissatisfied. She absolutely did not comprehend the things happening before her. She tried placing the reasons and what she didn't comprehend side by side in her mind but the end result was blurry. Too many things were incomprehensible. And for those few things she understood, a large part of them was very abstract.

Still, there was something like a premonition.

"Geez....."

Claribel walked in the palace.

She had originally wanted to see the real Queen but the Queen had left the palace with an unknown girl of Claribel's age. Lintence too. Why did he bring in the unfamiliar girl? No. She could tell he had snatched her away.

Claribel saw the Academy City from Grendan. Was that girl a student in this city? Though the filth monsters had made a ruckus yesterday night, the crisis had been safely averted. Claribel had heard the only people over in that city were boys and girls of her own age. She wanted to look but her grandfather had stopped her.

"What did you say?" she didn't get him.

But she had a premonition.

She stopped in the corridor. She could see a part of the city from here. The scenery was the usual Grendan. It was dry on the outside but full of energy in the inside. Though she knew she could feel the unexpected vitality if she was to walk the street, from here all she felt was silence. Perhaps this had to do with the layout of the buildings. Perhaps it was the influence of the tower?

What she saw now was probably different from the Academy city?

The curiosity in her heart gushed out again.

"Shall I go and see?"

Though her grandfather had stopped her, it was her freedom to listen to him or not. If she was found out, what awaited her would be harsh scolding..... But either way, she was the only one who would bear it.

So it should be okay?

That was what she was considering. Besides, wasn't Layfon over there?

"Layfon. But I have something to confirm too."

Her hand reached naturally for the Dite at her wrist.

Let's just head over to the Academy City. This idea urged Claribel. Layfon was there. He became a Heaven's Blade successor

at age ten. He was also the first Heaven's Blade to be exiled to another city.

"The person who once held the Heaven's Blade that I can't obtain....."

She wasn't that interested in his experience. What he did after becoming a Heaven's Blade successor. The thing that had happened, and his deed that a Military Artist shouldn't have committed..... Not interested at all – because she had already investigated them all. She even knew what the disabled Gahard Baren threatened Layfon with. The three royal families and the Heaven's Blade successors all knew.

Even so, it was not enough to placate the anger of the citizens. Layfon had told the normal citizens the horror of a Heaven's Blade successor. Though he had only told them a part of it, it was enough for them to feel the horror of a Heaven's Blade successor on a rampage. Only fellow Heaven's Blades could suppress a Heaven's Blade. And the Queen whose strength far exceeded all Heaven's Blades had no opponent.

They could destroy the entire city if they were to use their full strength.

Layfon possessed such power, and he had left Grendan to dwell in the Academy City, a gathering place for immature people.

For him who was still immature, Claribel wondered who he was living with.

Had he matured? Or was he still immature? She really wanted to test him.

"What should I do? Today....."

She looked at the city and turned her gaze to the sky.

Looking at herself.

A feeling of electricity had been moving behind her back. It wasn't just here and it wasn't just her who felt it. Everywhere else in the city felt the same. Though Grendan's streets were silent, behind it was a force, waiting to move.

A chaotic presence mixed in with the flow of air. It felt as if any small thing would make the situation dangerous. And it felt as if everyone had forgotten the principles of Military Artists and was making a commotion. But nothing had happened yet. Was it because Grendan's Military Artists weren't foolish enough to react to the influence in the air? Or did everyone think that this dangerous air was nothing compared to the coming storm? Or.....

"Claribel, what's up?"

"Ah, sensei."

The direction that the voice came from was her sensei – Troyatte .

"Did you just get up? It's rare to see you not sleeping."

"Ah, I'm tired of sleeping in. I seem to have gotten used to the exciting life."

"Only getting into the idealistic now?"

"That's one part of it..." she shrugged, knowing her sensei's personality.

"Has Layfon appeared?"

"Ah? No. I didn't see him. Lintence and Ruimei seem to have. And Savaris made a joke of being severely injured."

"Savaris-sama?"

"He didn't have the Heaven's Blade with him, but his head almost got separated from his body during a duel. He would have died if Lintence hadn't sewn him up."

".....Did Layfon do that?"

"Seems so. He's shown us something good."

"Has he become stronger?"

"He hasn't changed much from before, and he doesn't feel that terrible. Well, though I don't think it's good not to change, I can't say change is the benchmark to growth. That kind of thing is dependent of the situation."

"Just what are you trying to say?"

"Uncertainty. The ending Lintence set isn't quite bad."

"Lintence designed it? Then....."

Is he already dead?

"Still alive. Though I didn't hold much expectation for Lintence's naivety, I didn't feel the presence of death. Well, whether that guy lives or not doesn't matter to me. What do you think, Claribel?"

"I've learned the same having studied under you for five years."

She reached for the Dite at her waist. She touched it and wanted to pour Kei into it. But not yet. Sparks flew. It wasn't enough to burn up the tension in the air that was liquefied selenium.

"It's flashing though we still don't know what will happen."

"Doesn't matter, since I can't go to the center of the festival."

"Uh?"

"That's what a festival is, isn't it? The battlefield that only the chosen can enter. Though I don't like it, I'm still part of the Ronsmier family."

"And then? Do you still want to play in the bush with guys you like rather than dance around the bonfire of the festival?"

"If it's interesting."

"There are too many dangerous guys in this city who like to play with fire. I hate that."

"What do you think, Sensei?"

"What answer do you want?"

"Yeah, I shouldn't have asked."

He wasn't the type of teacher to solve a student's perplexity. No. This idea was formed because of her own willfulness. She walked out of the corridor after greeting Troyatte, yet he stopped at the same spot to look over Grendan as if replacing her.

Layfon Alseif.

Layfon Wolfstein Alseif. The young man who only had a one-year age gap with her. But he had obtained the acknowledgment that Claribel didn't have.

And.....And.....

"Do you still remember me?"

She really wanted to test him. To confirm it. Claribel pondered as she suppressed the two strong desires in her. If she were to follow her heart, where would she go?

She realized she was alone after passing through the door.

Alsheyra did not follow. The door remained open. If anything happened, Leerin could escape immediately, but she felt it meaningless to support herself with that thought in this place.

The dim blue continued to stretch ahead of her.

But the atmosphere had changed. Something conquered this place. The air did not seep past the door to the outside but remained in here. It was so quiet.

This was the atmosphere that surrounded Leerin.

The only furniture in the room was a bed. An old bed. A bed with a rich bed-cover and ornate decorations. The bed sheet seemed to leak dim blueness as if it had forgotten the passage of time. Cushions were piled on the bed like a hill.

A girl slept on the bed as if she were crafted along with it.

The person in Leerin's dream was sleeping here. The girl Leerin had seen in Zuellni.

It was her, Saya.

Everything seemed to be like a dream, ready to disappear in any moment. Leerin wondered whether the sleeping girl before her would disappear or if everything besides the girl would melt into nothingness. This was probably what it meant to acknowledge this girl's existence. If Leerin didn't do that, she felt this girl could not live alongside reality.

She pressed a hand to her chest. Her heart beat intensely with tension.

Why was she tense? Because of the girl? Because she noticed she was about to step on a line that would never allow her to turn back ? Because she was thinking of what was to come? Because she was thinking of the life of Leerin Marfes? Because once she crossed that line, she'd have to change her name to Leerin Eutnohl? Herder Eutnohl. Because she was to acknowledge this man as her real father?

Marfes. A name without any meaning. Her adopted father had given her this name. The name itself meant nothing. But it was a name given to enable her to enter the orphanage and forget her past, so she could keep on living. The name and its pronunciation meant nothing, but its existence was important.

Marfes. This name called forth her past. The life at the orphanage. The time with Layfon. Many things had happened. Sometimes it was sad, sometimes happy, sometimes difficult. She had felt contempt from people for being an orphan. The older brothers would protect the younger ones when that happened. The older sisters would encircle them with their gentle arms. Leerin also cared for her younger siblings after growing up. Layfon had replaced the fist, protecting the siblings with the achievements he made as a Military Artist. They were happy though time was harsh . So what if their parents weren't here? Many siblings had replaced them. They wouldn't lose to anyone. Besides, their adopted father was guarding them.

We had such happiness.

But it was destroyed.

No. Not Leerin, but Layfon.

Leerin believed it wasn't anyone's fault. She believed so. Even the reason behind Layfon's actions did not change her thinking, but she never thought another person would do the same besides Layfon.

Her brothers and sisters began to split apart after that. No, only Leerin and Layfon had been separated. Layfon had left for another city, and Leerin had entered another school, participating in the Student Council. She could only show up in the Dojo a few times because the school was far from the orphanage.

Did she regret it?

No way. She couldn't sink into regret and do nothing with her life. She didn't think it was Layfon's fault but she couldn't see her siblings anymore. And Layfon wasn't here. Leerin had become alone.

The name Marfes had this kind of background. Though it was rich with sadness, it was a name that had accompanied Leerin's growth. Was she to give it up? Give it up and inherit the name Eutnohl. This great yet meaningless name that could change her record?

She was now standing at a crossroad.

The girl was still asleep. Her tightly closed eyes seemed to await Leerin's decision.

Just one step. The problem was this one step. It was even heavier than Alsheyra's question. This step would decide everything. Once Leerin took this step, she could realize the determination she made in Zuellni. And if she was to take one step back, she could forget everything. She couldn't wrap everything up. She still had to rely on Layfon in the end. She came here

because she hated that side of hers. Insult? Regret? These words sighed at her impotence. If she had held the attitude of those words, she wouldn't have walked into this place.

The destruction began in herself. Leerin Marfes destroyed her own identity just like Layfon Alseif blackening out his own past. Cracks began to run through her. The most delicate repair could not fix it. Leerin knew she couldn't ignore the cracks anymore.

She had already decided what to do.

"……!"

She bit her lips and took a step forward.

It felt hard to breathe. Tension was at its peak. Suppressing her irregular breathing, Leerin came close to the bed and bent down. The soft mattress supported her.

The time on the bed began to flow. Saya opened her eyes.

"……I had a dream," Saya weaved her words softly. The quiet voice was enough to make one shiver. Her transparent voice slowly seeped into the darkness.

"You were in my dream. Is this the continuation of that dream?"

Leerin didn't know how to reply. How? Perhaps Saya was trying to confirm for herself.

"No. That's not it, Saya. This is real. At least, it's real to me."

"I see."

Saya lightly breathed in as she lay on the bed. She then slowly sat up. Her delicate legs quietly moved, guiding her body to bend down beside Leerin. She suddenly hugged Leerin tightly. Her delicate fingers brushed away her hair. Guided gently, Leerin buried her head in Saya's chest.

"I offer you my most sincere atonement and gratitude for your painful decision."

"Don't say that....."

Leerin's throat shook. Saya understood her. At Leerin's appearance, she understood what decision she had made. What she had chosen and given up.

"I.....I....."

Her throat shook, failing to give voice to her words. Leerin couldn't turn weak. That was how she kept encouraging herself. She had lived through everything. She had lived through it all by suppressing her cowardice.

"I'm sorry, but that's all I can say. No matter how much I say to you, no matter what expectations I hold, no matter how I defend them, it's all my personal wish. You've chosen a difficult life for that wish. I can say nothing but words of atonement and gratitude. "

"But you....."

Though it's not something unreasonable, I understand. Though it can't be clearly expressed in words, I understand. Saya wasn't in a slumber to sacrifice anyone. Besides, even if Saya held no consideration for Leerin and anyone else, everyone could keep on living only because of her existence.

Saya didn't need to apologize at all.

".....You didn't have to say that."

"Really?"

Saya's hand was still on the back of Leerin's head. Her gentle fingers parted her hair and touched her scalp. Saya's voice was crisp. Her fingers were delicate. An aroma cut through the tip of Leerin's nostrils. Everything here was so real. The thin sense of reality shattered the wall of the dam Leerin had desperately built around herself, making her think this was all an illusion.

"Uu, uu....."

Saya gently caressed her head. All she did was repeat the motion.

"Um, Ah....."

Sound of crying flowed from Leerin's throat. The dam had burst . Even so, she kept holding it in. She had already decided not to cry. And she'd not lose even if she cried out loud. She couldn't let anyone see her like this.....

"Ah. Ahah....."

Saya embraced her, continuing to caress her head. It felt as if she was being caressed by an adult. She couldn't stop it anymore.

Leerin cried.

She felt light pain in her head. Her eyes were hot. It was a bit embarrassing but she felt more relaxed after crying. The traces of her tears on Saya's dress were unbelievably real, as if they could bring her out of her dream.

"Feeling better?"

".....Thanks"

She took the handkerchief from Saya. She felt ashamed as she felt the rich material but she still used it to wipe her tears.

It was all right now.

She had let Saya see her shameful side, but it was all right. She could pretend nothing had happened with this level of shame. The days to come would definitely be more difficult. Helpless, she might even do more shameful acts. Today's crying was nothing compared to the future.

"Then let us talk. I don't understand anything. This right eye wants to tell me something but I don't understand. About the right eye, you, and anything I don't know. Please tell me everything."

"All right. I understand," Saya nodded lightly and began the explanation.

It was something that happened a long, long time ago.

"In this world exists a place to realize a wish."

"A wish?"

"Yes. Once you arrive there, no matter what it is, including what you are not conscious of, the thing that hides in the deepest corner of your heart, even that wish can come true."

"Even those things....."

"We call it the Zero Territory. The earth was once in a huge crisis. A huge war exploded across the world so a device was made to create Subspace in order to replenish the lack of resources. The Zero Territory was discovered as a result."

"The earth?"

"That was the origin of this world. Cracks appeared in the space that the earth was in because of the birth of Subspace. Subspace's role is to expand the world. Its effect allows different spaces to overlap that never touch each other. This world is also part of it. But because something unusual had happened in Subspace, cutting it off had become the deciding factor for survival. On one hand, Subspace has to maintain its shape as a space. On the other hand, it has to guarantee the amorphous interior, that is the Zero Territory. This all led to the splitting of the world."

"What came next was the era of humans living in Subspace. The earth originally belonged to them, but they did not know of it. They continued living and spreading in Subspace, not knowing what was happening to others.

An experiment was carried out during that time.

It was an experiment called the 'Severed Space Investigation Plan'. It was a plan to investigate the Zero Territory in order to find out the reason behind the cutting off of the world and another deeper problem – the Aurora atoms leaking out from the Zero Territory that cause changes in the human body."

"Airen was one of the people in the team. He's the true owner of your right eye."

At that time, Saya was in Zero Territory.

"Unlike him, I was born in another space. I was one of the people of another culture. But because of Airen's discovery and the interference with the Zero Territory, I gained the same form of the young sister that person had lost."

"Younger sister.....? And then?"

Could it be that the Saya Leerin saw in Zuellni was another Saya? Saya gave confirmation to her suspicion.

"Yes. Nelphilia. That person's sister's name."

That child Nelphilia had accidentally fallen into Zero Territory. The limit of Subspace also came to a breaking point following the passage of time.

"Then, was her wish realized?"

"Yes. It should have been destroyed at the same time but that didn't happen."

"Destroyed?"

"The wish of a human is not perfect. But to put it in perspective, people can keep on living to realize unreachable wishes. However, an imperfect wish can come true in Zero Territory, giving form to its imperfection."

Everyone was the same. They would fall into an exhausted state after experiencing the joy of seeing their wish come true.

Or it might be a feeling of despair at understanding the ugliness within oneself.

Witnessing the self that headed for destruction because of imperfection.

"People who lose their vitality in Zero Territory would immediately die. The state of the heart is closely tied to one's existence. Even a machine reflects its maker's heart, so many people died. I was born to bring hope amidst destruction, so I didn't die in Zero Territory. But that space is extremely dangerous to people. But Nelphilia lived. Airen too."

"Why could the two of them survive?"

"This is only a guess, but Nelphilia probably wanted more people to acknowledge her beauty. Her definition of power is to have many people obey her. Her wish is limitless. I think she

understood the limit that the Aurora atoms imposed on the realization of a dream and she took advantage of it. Next is Airen. He didn't know his sister had changed. He participated in the plan to save his sister. After that, the wish of that person came true according to the rule of Zero Territory. At the same time, my heart resonated with him as I wanted to complete my mission, so I obtained the form of his sister. That person's wish was for his sister to escape and for him to obtain the power to protect her so she wouldn't encounter a similar event. That was how we escaped Zero Territory."

"Wait a minute....." Leerin said.

Something felt strange.

"So the Zero Territory can realize one's dream?"

"Yes."

"But Airen's wish hasn't entirely come true. Wasn't his sister in the Zero Territory? Why didn't she herself appear?"

"The Zero Territory cannot do everything. If Airen had known she was there, things would have turned out differently. But it didn't happen. Zero Territory only listened to that person's wish and made it come true in its own way. It can't distinguish what's true and false. The Zero Territory is not a system with that level of consciousness. It simply exists to give form to a wish. Same as the meaning of the words, it grants the form. I became like this because I was accidentally caught in it."

"So all that Zero Territory makes true is false?"

"Only the person himself can tell whether it's true or false. Besides, only he himself can tell whether the fake can satisfy his wish."

Leerin breathed in deeply as she looked at Saya. Her false form came about from Airen's wish. She wasn't the sister he wished to see. Had Saya been worried about that? Perhaps she's still worried. Because she's always been waiting for the person named Airen.

"Sorry."

"It's okay. Let us continue."

The plan to investigate the Severed Space fell through. Airen escaped together with the experimental object, Saya. They then met the scientist who opened the Subspace – Rigzario. The three of them began a journey. Rigzario had been traveling in order to fix the problems appearing on the Subspace device due to its overuse for a long period of time. But the wearing out of the device far exceeded her predictions. In the end, Rigzario was caught in the collapse of another world just like Saya and became another scientist hovering in Zero Territory. The result was the summoning of Ignasis into this world. Ignasis obtained his power in the Zero Territory and destroyed the device of Subspace in the name of experimentation, trapping millions of people in Zero Territory.

"How could....."

That meant death.

"His aim was to find the proof of souls and the paths of the people who disappeared in Zero Territory. Did despair really make people disappear? Had Severed Space really destroyed Subspace?"

"To get so many people involved just for that....."

"The experiment was a success. Though the proof of souls is not definite, the people inside Zero Territory still exist. The total collapse of Subspace has eliminated Severed Space. Ignasis should have created a passage connecting it to other Subspaces."

"Should have?"

"I was made to allow the people to take shelter from the collapsing Subspace. Those people who had been melted by the Zero Territory lived inside me, and I was to use Rigzario's device to give them new lives in a new Subspace."

"Do you mean this is it?"

"Yes, it's here."

That was how this world was born.

"But at the same time of creating a new Subspace, Zero Territory started invading Severed Space. Ignasis sought to destroy this world so Airen prepared some defensive mechanisms. He used the power in his right eye to seal the space where Ignasis and his followers were in. And that's.....the moon of this world."

"The moon....."

The moon hanging in the sky.....had such a secret.

"But Ignasis didn't just sit on the dim moon and wait for his destruction. He hates this world and that hatred made this world inhabitable for humans."

"Pollutants."

"Yes. In order to combat the weapon of Ignasis that was strengthened after absorbing his hatred, Airen let his own genes descend from the moon."

"And they are Military Artists and Psychokinesists."

This voice came from a third party.

Leerin turned around and saw numerous masks had appeared behind her. Strange masks wearing the faces of beasts. Those masks lined in a row as if to decorate the wall of this space flooded with dim moonlight.

"I thought it already took you tremendous energy to open the hole in Zuellni's sky," Saya said faintly, replacing the speechless Leerin.

"Though many people live in this land, we have numerous comrades on this side of the sky. No matter what, this battle is our victory because in Zero Territory exists slumbering souls that far exceed the number of people in this world."

"Even so, you won't know the end result."

"....."

"Numbers mean nothing in Zero Territory. The so-called power of numerous souls only obeys a stronger consciousness. You people are an example."

"Then to prevent that strong consciousness from visiting Zero Territory, we can only fight in this world."

Bodies appeared one after another. They wore the same clothes and had the same form. They were the same as those that Nina fought in Myath.

In their hands held weapon of the same structure. They were like mirror reflections as they attacked together. The speed of the attack, the air and the shouts filled with murderous intent made Leerin shut her eyes tightly.

Though she had shut her eyes,

she could still see them.

At that time, the one who was impacted was Nina.

She couldn't express the secret behind the creation of this world that Schneibel had revealed.

"Do you believe?"

"Is this a matter of believing or not believing?"

At least Nina had given some reply to the question. No one could tell why this world was born. Humanity lived matter of factly inside Regios, living in fear of pollutants and filth monsters that were outside the city. This was the world that Nina understood.

The ridiculous story of the creation of this world. It was neither an ambiguous myth nor something that the Alchemists had experimented on. Though it was grand, it was far from reach. It felt like a dangling story. But the story coming from the Electronic Fairies didn't feel like a lie.

"Electronic Fairies have no reason to lie to me. At least, all of you here believe in that story."

"Exactly," Grendan nodded, its long fur swaying, its cold and icy gaze staring at Nina.

"So has Grendan, the Lance Shelled City, been battling till now for that day?"

"I move the city in place of the slumbering Saya. One of Grendan's aims "to stop the end of war" matches my hatred. This increased the power of Military Artists and successfully gave birth to several outstanding Military Artists. Their combination increased the density of Airen's genes in their bodies. And then they were gathered in Grendan's three royal families to give birth to the most ideal person."

"The most ideal person?"

"Gather Airen's dispersed genes and make a copy. That is the purpose of Grendan's royal family. It was originally close to finishing but a mistake in the process has increased the time period ."

Grendan did not reveal the identity of that person but he must mean the Queen. The Military Artist who surpassed all Heaven's Blade successors. She struck down the aged phase filth monster that Layfon and Savaris failed to defeat even though she was far away from the battlefield. Grendan's royal family had spent a huge amount of time to create such a powerful Military Artist. This must be it.

But the Electronic Fairies said it wasn't finished. Something was still lacking.

"Not everything was included in the predictions. Whether it could explain the problem that happened before or if it means there's still some time before adjustment is finished, I'm not sure," Schneibel said slowly.

"But right now a hole has opened in the sky of the Academy City. Its cause is eventually linked to the Lance Shelled City. Then it might not be the first battle but the final decisive battle. We have to act according to it. Nina. The child of Schneibel's knight. My child. Perhaps you might become the hope of the Electronic Fairies . As a creature that gives life to this world's lives and lives in this world, one cannot entrust the entire wheel of fate to this world's temporary dwellers. You will become the key or the first of the new generation or the helpless abandoned child who falls down in the wilderness. I'm not clear. But we now need new power as guardians of this world."

"You mean I'm the new power?"

"That isn't our choice, but yours and Melnisc's, the one who deeply knows this world's despair."

Nina looked at the Haikizoku, Melnisc. The golden goat kept silent, immobile.

"This choice appears like a dilemma to you who understands the limit of hungry wolves. But what we need now is not the flame of destruction but the blade of a guardian."

"....."

Melnisc remained silent. It stubbornly remained silent before the gazes of Schneibel, Grendan, Zuellni and Nina. It did not express clearly whether it was confused or resolutely refusing. Nina couldn't discern anything from the Electronic Fairy's expression.

".....I see. If you don't make a choice then Nina's reply would also be ignored."

"Uh?"

"Right now, you and Melnisc are in one body. It's meaningless if the two consciousnesses are not in agreement even though this situation is temporary. But I have to say this clearly, Melnisc. The limit is unclear. You also know confusion cannot create anything."

"I'll remember it, Great Mother."

Schneibel nodded at the goat's reply.

"Then let us observe the flow of time in Grendan."

Everything turned faint at the fading of the voice. The Electronic Fairies disappeared from Nina's eyes. Zuellni too, and Melnisc.

"Wait. I still don't....."

The Electronic Fairies ignored her. Their figures turned even fainter, gradually merging into the darkness.

"Zuellni."

"I'll definitely return."

The young girl hugged Nina's neck. Her figure slowly disappeared along with a tangible yet intangible feeling of vagueness.

"Wait. What do you mean by returning?"

But her surroundings were empty when she spoke. Her consciousness changed. Nina knew she was waking up from her dream.

Someone was staring at her.

".....Eh?"

"Ah, you awake?"

A stranger stood before the confused Nina. The person was smaller than her but Nina could feel this person had had a good education from her fine and delicate countenance.

"This is?"

She put a hand on her temple to calm her head. She had had a long dream and she still clearly remembered its content. Was it real? And just where was she now?

"Ah, don't remember? And I wanted to see just what kind of a person Lintence-sama has brought back."

"Ah....."

She remembered.

Leerin was taken away after Layfon was defeated in Zuellni. She had then chased after her. But reality had failed. She had

obtained the Haikizoku's power and defeated the giants easily though the enemies had put them in a difficult fight. Still, that much power was not even worth mentioning before a Heaven's Blade successor.

(What a horrifying gap in strength.)

She didn't even manage to get one strike in.

"No need to be so sad. Lintence-sama is special even among Heaven's Blade successors. No other Heaven's Blades can defeat him."

Must be comforting me. Nina looked at the girl. Her long hair was gathered together. The strands of white hair mixed in her dark hair stood out clearly.

"Ah, I'm Claribel Ronsmier. This is Grendan's palace. What is your name?"

"I'm Nina Antalk. A student in Zuellni."

Claribel clapped her hands as Nina gave her name.

"As I thought. And I thought you were a Grendan Military Artist that I didn't know."

"Was I captured?"

Nina reached to her waist but the Dites were missing from her weapon harness.

(This is only natural.)

"Are these your Dites?"

"What!"

She was speechless at the two Dites next to her bed.

"Wasn't I caught?"

"Who knows? Her Majesty didn't say anything and she didn't arrange anyone to monitor you. But if you do anything you'll get caught by Kanaris-sama."

"Even so, to not take away the weapons is a bit....."

"Then show me how much you can do? Either way, it's my first time meeting someone possessed by a Haikizoku."

"!"

"Ahah, sorry. I know a bit of it because of my identity."

"Does that mean it's ok even if I escape to the outside?"

"As you wish. You have freedom as long as you don't cause a commotion. But I don't think it's possible to escape. Either way, this is Grendan's palace. The home of monsters."

The anticipation sparkling in Claribel's eyes made Nina shiver. Her gaze was enjoying watching Nina's actions and anticipating the coming of chaos.

".....What're you doing here?"

The sudden sound of disapproval wasn't surprising. Rather, this rare question of common sense made Nina feel more at ease.

It was an elegant man with perfect long black hair. Nina wasn't sure but she felt this man was similar to Claribel. And this person was watching her in surprise.

There wasn't the sound of a door opening. Nina also didn't feel his presence when he came in. He wore a weapon harness at his waist. This man was a Military Artist, and he was powerful.

"You too. What're you coming here for?"

"Tigris is looking for you. He thinks you might be being naughty again."

"Ah, as expected of my grandfather."

"So it's true."

An even more surprising expression on the man's proper face.

"Can't say something like "don't think of it" under this situation. It's all right since all Heaven's Blade successors had a chance to show their strength but we don't have that chance."

"Take care of what you say. You're the inheritor of the Ronsmier family."

"Someone from my grandfather and grandmother's family can inherit even if anything happened to me, since grandfather has many children."

"How surprising."

"I think you are the one with the problem since you don't feel a thing."

The man's face showed an expression of one being given no choice at the younger person's words. Claribel looked at Nina.

"I forgot to introduce. The one over there is Minse Eutnohl. My.. ....Uh, though we're not of the same seniority in our family, it's annoying, so please just treat him as my older cousin."

"Is she the one possessed by the Haikizoku? Her Majesty should have already taken away the other person," Minse said.

"Who knows? I don't know where Her Majesty has taken the other person to."

"Damn."

"Speaking of which, Layfon seems to be in that city. What would you do?"

"If I see him I'll have him die."

"I know."

"......Hey, you knew already?"

"Of course. I'll deliver the message as it is. What about you?"

"Since that's all I can do."

Minse left with anxiety on his face.

"That person had a bad experience because of Layfon. He holds a personal grudge but that's his own fault."

Nina was shocked at her mentioning Layfon.

(Yes. This is Grendan. The city that holds a painful past for him.)

She hadn't had the time to tidy up her emotions because of Savaris and the invasion by filth monsters. Why had she become so gloomy?

"You know Layfon, don't you?"

"......He's in my team."

No point hiding it.

"Then you should understand the current Layfon. Ah~~ but it still isn't good enough to compare with the past. As I thought, it's better to just see him face to face."

"What are you planning to do with him?"

"Do you know why he left Grendan?"

"....."

"You knew."

"Wait, Layfon, that guy.....Perhaps he did do something wrong but!"

"Don't worry. No one looks at him in contempt from the view of a Military Artist."

"Eh?"

Claribel laughed in a carefree manner before the numbed Nina.

"Her Majesty, the Heaven's Blades and us three royal families. We all knew the reason behind his actions. However, he let the citizens of this city know the horrifying power of a Heaven's Blade successor. They shouldn't have to know of it. Because that cannot be forgiven, we decided to exile him."

Claribel's words should be believable. Though Nina once was horrified at seeing Layfon eliminating the larvae on his own, her feelings had quickly turned into envy. But what would it be like if the witnesses of that scene were not Military Artists but normal citizens? Naruki's friend. What if that girl Meishen saw it?

"In truth, I think even Military Artists wouldn't think much if they were to see him again. The Heaven's Blade successors aren't interested, and the other Military Artists know of the gap of strength between them and him but it's better for him not to meet up with the ordinary citizens of the city."

".....Layfon can't see them."

"Uh?"

He can't meet with the city's citizens. He can't meet with the normal people. That reality heavily pressed down on his heart.

"He can't see his family."

Nina couldn't accept it after hearing the words even though she herself had experienced a sad past. Layfon only did it for the orphanage. He gave his all for his family. He ended in failure. They thought he had betrayed them and they hated him for it.

Did they still hate him now?

"I too can't understand how my family feels," Claribel said icily. "A bad deed will eventually be exposed. And this event that Layfon is associated with was easily discovered. No matter what he planned to do, he had to shoulder the result, whether it was good or bad."

"Yes, you're right."

She couldn't retort her theory because she herself had considered the same thing. She left her home, Schneibel, without considering her father's feelings.

"But the right discussion is only limited to a discussion. It can't be used for all cases."

Claribel looked out the window as if avoiding Nina's gaze. The top part of Zuellni's tower entered Nina's gaze.

Had Zuellni smoothly won through the crisis? No. It had a Military Artist strong as Lintence. And it must be safe now by the peaceful look of it. The problem now was that the city's leg was broken. Who knew how much longer it would take to repair it. And the next question was whether filth monsters would appear during the repair period.

Nina left the bed without thinking and came to the window.

"You haven't thought for yourself."

"Eh?" she turned around to Claribel.

"Wouldn't one worry about oneself in this situation?"

"Ah, ahah. That seems to be it now that you mention it."

"Or that you have the confidence to escape from Grendan?"

"It's not like that....."

There were too many things to consider. She herself didn't know where to begin. The Queen had said something was to happen in Grendan. And then there was the conversation of the Electronic Fairies she saw in her dream. A huge riddle was stirring . She wanted to solve it. Leerin was taken away. It was

unquestionable for her to return to her own city as she was Grendan's citizen, but Nina felt something was hidden behind it. She also wanted to confirm this suspicion.

So many things had happened. She didn't know where to begin.

"Or do you want to see the things that are to happen here?"

"The Queen asked the same thing."

She lost to Lintence even though the Haikizoku was in her. Just what was she doing here? She felt impotent once she thought of it.

"I don't know what I can do now and I don't know what I should be doing. But I can't do nothing. Leerin's been taken away. Though she belongs here, it's normal for her to be taken back. But I can't accept the fact of her being forcibly taken away without reason. I want to know the reason behind it."

"This Leerin person is the one that Her Majesty has taken away? "

"Yes."

"What's her relationship with you?"

"She lived with me in the same dormitory and she's Layfon's childhood friend."

"Layfon? I see."

Here it came again. Nina's body turned stiff.

Claribel's meaningful words threatened her. "This means she grew up in the same orphanage as him?"

"Aah, they did mention it."

What's going on? She did say she didn't hold anything against Layfon for his crime but it seemed she held some other feelings for him.

"Then Layfon will definitely come," she said to herself.

She felt dangerous.

Claribel had said that the Military Artists wouldn't do anything to him. The Heaven's Blades weren't interested in Layfon. The other Military Artists wouldn't do anything since they knew the distance of strength between them and him. Then what kind of Military Artist would choose to confront Layfon? Claribel didn't look like a Heaven's Blade successor. She had mentioned the "three royal families" so she must be part of this city's government and she was a Military Artist.

Right now only she was considering a battle with Layfon.

But why?

"You and Layfon....." Nina didn't get to finish.

Sudden.

Suddenly, Claribel moved.

"!"

Nina had no time to react. Why did she reach out to the weapon harness? When did she restore the Dite?

Her arm was already next to Nina's face when she reacted.

"What're you doing being so sneaky?" the expressionless Claribel asked behind Nina.

The sound of dry splitting echoed in the ears. If Claribel's Dite was of a blade type then the blade must be in a spiral shape judging from the turning of the elbow.

Nina turned around and seeing what she saw, leaped away to restore her Dite. The heavy iron whips appeared in her hands.

A mask. A beast's face emerged from it. Claribel reached out to it. Her blade had cut deeply into the mask, splitting it apart.

Claribel's Dite was of a strange shape. The red painted part revealed the strong part where the blade had cut open the mask. The handle was like a glove protecting the fist, the fingers going through the four holes in the handle of the blade. Thorns were attached to the defensive part of the weapon and a small knife was attached to a side of the handle.

The shape was unique to her. It contained a strong sense of offense.

"Wolf Faces....."

A body was revealed behind the split mask. It toppled and melted into the air. Similar masks continued to appear before Nina . They wore the same clothes and held the same weapon. They stood in an orderly row like dolls in a mirror. All of them rushed for Claribel.

"You things are nothing in front of my Kochouenshiken (Bladed wing of the flaming butterfly)."

Claribel attacked.

Nina stood rooted on the spot.

Claribel rushed them. Her long hair that was tied back danced agilely in the air. The scarlet blade in her hand moved with innumerable changes. Its weight and speed varied according to her body movements. Death leaped as if it was dancing. The Wolf Faces who attempted to surround her had their masks shattered. They didn't even have to time to lift their weapons. Their arms were cut off and they fell to the ground to disappear.

Before one could breathe, she had eliminated all the Wolf Faces in the house.

"You can't even start a fire in this city," she murmured, bored.

"You too....." Nina's words stopped halfway. She couldn't think of a suitable word to symbolize the relationship she had with the Wolf Faces. Are you Dixerio's friend? Have you seen him? Is this a good way to say it?

"Aa, so you've seen them too?" Claribel ignored Nina's confusion. An innocent smile appeared on her face.

"I wonder whether all Haikizoku-possessed have this kind of special treatment? No, no. They are the enemies of the Electronic Fairies. You know of it, don't you?"

She asked Nina a question instead. Nina was speechless, not catching on what the question was about.

"I have a bond with them because of my blood. I somehow knew of their existence since I was little. But about blood, Minse that you saw before is also the same."

"That man too....."

She was surprised as Minse didn't look all that reliable.

"Her Majesty seems too pure so she can't see them. But she is better trained than us with this sensitivity so she might have been always opening and closing her eyes."

Nina knew of the Queen. Looking from the conversation between the Electronic Fairies, it felt strange that the Queen and the Wolf Faces hadn't yet clashed.

"Well, these useless fools seem to be on the move while we're chatting. Wanna go and clean up together?"

Claribel restored the weapon back to its Dite form and left the room. She wanted Nina to go with her.

"Eh? Hey."

Can she? She wanted to ask and stopped herself. This might become a good opportunity to escape.

She walked through the stone paved corridor, behind Claribel. The people walking past them all asked after Claribel with sincere attitudes but they coldly ignored Nina.

"I said already. Only Minse and I know of it. It'll become troublesome in many areas once others know. Do you understand? Anyway, this is trouble so I have to quickly tidy it up."

"You said to tidy them up but do you understand who they are? "

Nina only knew that something was to happen while she was in Myath. She knew of nothing else. She didn't even know the purpose of the hostile Wolf Faces. In the end, she didn't know what to do even when the event happened.

Wouldn't Claribel understand more compared to the Nina back then?

"I know. At least I know why they came to Grendan."

"Is, is that so?"

"But I haven't been to other cities through the En system so I don't know what they do in other cities."

"En?"

Dixerio seemed to have said the same thing.

"You can explain it as a communication system between Electronic Fairies."

"There is such a thing?"

"Otherwise how do they tell each other apart when cities fight?"

"......I see."

"Of course. I've heard of people using the En system to jump. I've never experienced it. You?"

"Once."

"I see. There really are people who can do it."

They walked out of the palace styled building as they chatted.

(I'm really out. Is it ok?)

She was worried since she was a captive but Claribel walked on the street, indifferent.

"Clara."

The sound came from behind them. Minse was walking from the direction of the palace.

"How many did you get?"

"The palace is quiet."

"Thanks for your hard work."

"The number is larger than usual this time."

"It's ok now. There probably will be a large-scale appearance later. What do you think they're aiming for?"

"To put it correctly, it should be the Inner Court. This time they seem to be targeting something more. Then there's only one thing to do."

"Her Majesty is in the Inner Court. Don't worry."

"Then what's left is above the ground. So troublesome."

"Yes. This is the key. I think it's better not to approach the Inner Court for now."

"What a coincidence. I think so too."

"For some reason, I think we'd end up making Her Majesty mad ."

"So scary."

"Especially for you who has had that kind of experience."

"Nonsense."

Minse left this word and headed for a different direction.

"Fu.....seems this isn't as simple as usual. Let's go on a serious patrol."

Claribel increased her pace as if she didn't care about Nina.

Nina hesitated for a split second. This was the only time to escape. They just said "The Queen is in the Inner Court." Then Leerin was probably there too. Leave Claribel here and save Leerin from the Inner Court. Can this be done? Problem is, where was the Inner Court?

(What should I do?)

Leave Claribel to search for the Inner Court? But she might become an enemy once she escaped. That is definite. Then let's rendezvous with Layfon who is coming from Zuellni and rescue Leerin together? That was the calmest judgment she can make under this situation.

(What should I do?)

She kept asking herself. Claribel continued to walk by herself. Has she not noticed me?

"Ah, that's right."

She suddenly turned around.

"I won't chase after you even if you escape. Compared to that, other Military Artists will probably hunt you down? There are serious guys among the Heaven's Blades. Their subordinates should be monitoring you."

"....."

Cadenza Road Itto: Part 2

Speechless, Nina followed Claribel. Right now, she had no other way. It was paramount to understand Claribel as she was a Military Artist who fought the Wolf Faces. Nina could persuade herself with this line of thinking. The most important thing was that she didn't feel any observers monitoring her. Was this the result of that dream? Though she felt the Haikizoku insider her body – the existence of Melnisc, she didn't feel the stirring and hot blood she felt when they fought together in a battle. This meant he wasn't lending her any power, so that might be why Claribel knew she didn't notice their presence?

But Claribel noticed the observers without needing the Haikizoku's help. Grendan's Military Artists were truly strong. Why would someone of this level still thirst for a Haikizoku? No. Compared to that, right now she should.....

(Wait.)

This meant they had also seen the fight back then? But they didn't get caught. Was that it?

Claribel had said that only she and Minse could fight the Wolf Faces here. Then they must be very important to Grendan. It shouldn't be strange that there were people protecting them in the shadows. In that case, there should be people who had seen them fight?

Would they get caught in this fight with the Wolf Faces just by looking? Then how did Nina get herself involved?

(You can't get involved just by looking.)

Nina thought so as she followed Claribel. Right now that was all she could do.

Then what did Nina herself see at that time and how was that event triggered?

She tried to recall the past.

"Right, let's start here."

Claribel's soft words called her back to reality. Though this was the city's center, the surrounding environment was a quiet residential area. The house before Nina had the same structure as Nina's own home. Was this a rich family or did it belong to a Military Artist of a strong dojo?

Claribel leaped over the wall without changing her expression.

"Hey!"

"It's okay."

"But....."

"If we worried about the details, they'd be doing whatever they want."

This was an illegal intrusion but she was speaking loudly. She was conversing in a relaxed manner. Though Nina was a bit nervous, she followed.

"Well, they wouldn't be that hardworking if they could do whatever they liked," Claribel said as she landed.

All Nina saw while standing on the top of the wall was the tall trees close to her and the top part of a three story mansion. The tragic scene shocked her after she landed. Normally, this ground should be covered with grass and adorned with a fountain but what replaced it now was a hard surface that hadn't been repaired.

"This is....."

A hole was in the middle of the wavy hard surface of the ground. Nina stomped hard on the ground. It was unbelievable that this was land judging by the hardness of it. She gave it a kick and it didn't budge.

"This is Heaven's Blade successor Ruimei's home. That person trains in the courtyard every morning at the same time. Thanks to him, Grendan's citizens can wake up on time everyday."

Claribel walked in someone else's home normally.

Nina couldn't believe the feeling coming from her under her feet. A person who held the title of a Heaven's Blade successor. It was easy for him to shatter the ground but all he did was make it harder. This wasn't just the turning of the ground into hard soil. It

had become another type of substance through repeated compression. This was proof that he could control that strength and perfectly control his Kei.

"Those guys use the people living here as mediums to appear because they don't have a real form other than their masks."

Claribel kept walking and arrived at the backdoor. This was probably used by hired hands. The room immediately behind the door would be the kitchen if this building had the same layout as Nina's home, and this backdoor was probably used for deliveries.

The door opened easily.

The aroma of spice wafted out from the kitchen. The structure of this mansion was the same as Nina's, and most of the people in this mansion were normal people.

"Is it okay?"

"It's all right since this mansion is also one of the targets."

Nina could only watch regardless of Claribel's actions. Claribel walked into the corridor without using Sakkei. The appetizing smell became stronger. The two of them came to the kitchen as Nina expected. In the kitchen were three chefs and a woman monitoring them. All four had their backs to them. The chiefs were making dishes. The four of them turned around when they noticed Nina and Claribel.

"Ahah, Claribel-sama? Do you want anything from us?" the woman asked, ignoring the flustered Nina. "You're making it difficult for me with a sudden visit."

"The smell is good, Mrs. MacRing."

"It's almost lunch time. That person eats a lot."

The woman smiled with a hand covering her mouth. Her fingertips showed signs of having been through training. She was also a Military Artist.

"Yeah. It's normal for Ruimei-sama to have a large eating capacity. Sorry for the sudden visit. Can we join you?"

"Sure. We've no reason to refuse Claribel-sama's visit."

"Ahhh, that makes me happy. Then can I make a small request?"

"Is this request something that I don't have? My chef can make most of the dishes but with the ingredients....."

"I don't mean to increase it for me. On the other hand, I want you to reduce it."

"Aa....."

"I mean seasoning. For example, the small bottle over there."

Claribel meant the bottle closest to her. She was about to move for the bottle in the chef's hand who was putting the seasoning on the dish.

The air froze in that moment. Not only the woman but the chef holding the small bottle. Even the other two chefs had stopped moving. Nina didn't know what was inside the bottle as she didn't know how to cook. Though it was seasoning, it didn't feel like the type that an outsider could imagine.

"It seems like an unusual type of seasoning. As a member of the royal family, I can't casually speak of something I don't know."

"I understand. Then I won't add it to the meals of Claribel-sama and your friend. My husband likes it more....."

"Time to stop lying, Mrs. MacRing."

"....."

The woman was happily talking about her husband..... She suddenly stopped. It seemed the passage of time had also halted.

Nina didn't understand her expression. She was speechless in this unusual circumstance so she could only observe how this event would unfold. She found it strange that Claribel could converse normally in this situation.

"The rumor's spread outside. Ruimei-sama's lover recently gave birth to a child, and she is also a Military Artist. I understand the feeling of his wife who can't bear children but I don't think he had to do it that way."

"You don't understand as you're still young."

"No, I'm also female, and I'm a child of the royal family so I understand very well the treatment of one who can't give birth to the next generation."

"Even so, you won't understand. Our standings are different. Our path from now on will be even more difficult on a certain level. But you'll never understand the feeling of losing to another woman."

"The term replacement is especially sensitive within the royal family. I wouldn't want to comprehend its meaning if possible."

"No! You still don't understand!" the woman shouted, covering her face.

Was she crying? Seemed to be so from the noise she made. But what about her expression?

Nina didn't comprehend. Nor did she understand. Because all of them, whether it was the woman or the three chefs, wore the mask of a Wolf Face.

"Anyway, confusion is taking you to a bad direction. Let me take that thing down."

Claribel began handling her job faintly.

"No, you can't."

The woman's head was still lowered. A voice came from somewhere deep within her.

"I must let that person know of my feelings."

"Then take down the mask first and resolve it."

"No. No."

"This is decided."

"No!"

The woman lifted her head.

Claribel moved.

Nina failed to see her restore her Dite again. Kochouenshiken was already in her hand when Nina reacted. The scarlet blade cut the mask in half. The woman's body bent backward. High pitched moaning filled the kitchen. The chefs attacked with kitchen knives in their hands. Their foreheads were pierced by a scarlet thing in the next second. The masks split into two. The needle-like cloud that destroyed only the masks scattered.

The needle was the product of Karen Kei.

The chefs continued to moan and then fell onto the floor with the woman.

"Are they dead?"

"Just fainted."

A quick and carefree reply. Claribel took the bottle from the kitchen and tossed all the finished and half-finished cooking into the rubbish bin.

"Let's go to the next stop."

She planned to ignore the fallen and leave.

"What about them?"

"They won't remember a thing after waking up. That event just then has taken advantage of her personality and her dissatisfaction with reality. She didn't do it deliberately. This is what is called "the demon gives orders and the underlings work." Fortunately, they're weak characters."

They left the mansion and leaped over the wall as Claribel explained.

"Well, now I know their goal. To assassinate the Heaven's Blade successors. They might be doing some destructive work too. I can only leave that to Minse."

"Those guys do something like this in Grendan?"

Nina had seen the Wolf Faces two times. One was when she met Dixerio. The other was in Myath. The Wolf Faces took the initiative to attack with weapons in both times. But this was first time seeing them using others to get to the Heaven's Blades.

"This isn't the first time so it isn't anything new. No matter who it is, people have one to two weaknesses if you look carefully. Perhaps they think they can't defeat the Heaven's Blade successors without using these means. One Heaven's Blade is still needed among the twelve Heavens' Blade successors. And Savaris-sama can't move as he's injured. Thinking of the future from now, they probably think it better to make one or two more immobile."

"Future....."

Nina recalled the Electronic Fairies' conversation. They said something was about to happen. The origin of Regios – the slumbering Saya in Lance Shelled City. Airen who sealed off the people in the moon, those who sought to destroy this world. Ignasis and his subordinates, the Wolf Faces. They were sealed away but they continued to plan the destruction of this world through pollutants. They used the pollutants to create a new ecological environment. The filth monsters that acted as the weapons of destruction in the past.

Something related to them was about to happen. It could possibly be a battle. And a very intense battle at that. Hence the Wolf Faces were getting active in order to make the balance of victory tilt to their side.

Was that it?

She kept hesitating. What should she be doing now? She should observe the fight with the Wolf Faces and she should also participate. But in reality, she could do nothing except follow Claribel. No. Perhaps this couldn't be helped. Her current situation was like her situation at Myath. She was in a state in which she had even lost her innate mission of what she had to do.

"Speaking of which, what do you think of my skill just then when I unsheathed the Katana?"

"Uh?"

Claribel asked her just when she was deep in thought. She turned around with disapproval, sensing Nina's slow reaction.

"Really. Didn't hear me? That's the skill to unsheathe a Katana. Leave aside the accuracy of cutting down the mask first. The most important thing is speed. Speed. Didn't you find it really quick?"

"Ah. Yes. Very quick."

She didn't even see her restore the Dite. Though Claribel was praising herself, her accuracy in cutting the mask was incredible.

"Faster than Layfon?"

Her eyes sparkled. She still couldn't stop herself from asking.

"I, I wonder."

Nina still felt Layfon was faster but the speed Claribel used to unsheathe the weapon was a first for Nina.

"Layfon's capacity of Kei is the highest even among the Heaven's Blade successors. I can't surpass him but I think I have the advantage with speed," she said.

Some unknown feeling rushed out in Nina's heart as she watched her. She didn't feel happy about it but she couldn't be sure what it was.

Claribel kept talking on her own. It had become a monologue that didn't need an audience.

"But the problem is the source of Layfon's Military Arts, the Katana technique. The skill to unsheathe a Katana can't be underestimated. Don't think I'm out of it. I've always done heaps of research but I feel that I'd lose if I studied under Psyharden to understand the essence of his Katana technique. Besides, the strengths of others who wield Katana don't differ much..... Ah, in fact, the current person who holds the Psyharden skill is someone called Derek Psyharden. You can count the number of people who are on par with the strength of his Katana skills in the entirety of Grendan."

"Ha....."

"I don't quite understand the situation now but my grandfather said he's someone who has room to spare whether he fights one on one or with a group. He isn't on the Heaven's Blade level but he

has extremely high skill. The lowest requirement of a Heaven's Blade successor is to possess an amount of Kei that only a Heaven's Blade can sustain. But his skill is probably the level of a Heaven's Blade. And from here I can understand why Layfon took the Heaven's Blade at his age. No. Hang on a sec. In that case, under the situation that my grandfather is a Heaven's Blade but one Heaven's Blade is still missing an owner then the question is, why I can't become a Heaven's Blade? So the things before don't mean anything. Pretend I didn't say anything. Got it? Thanks very much..... Then Layfon could so speedily make his achievement because of an experienced teacher, Derek Psyharden. What a shame that the weapon I chose is different from my grandfather's. I can't mature quickly. Ara? Then what I said before counts, doesn't it? Never mind. It doesn't matter. Anyway, I want to stress that I'm not weaker than Layfon. I won't lose to him even if I were to confront him directly. Besides, I might even win. I'd have to boast about it. Eh? To whom? To Layfon of course."

.....She spoke it all at once, totally overwhelming Nina.

Claribel's attitude and words were cold when she first met Nina but her monologue just then had less negative elements of hostility and murderous intent. All Nina felt from her was competitiveness.

And she was very innocent.

The second strong and young Military Artist that Layfon met seemed to hold some misunderstanding towards him. The leader of the Mercenary Gang, Haia, was the same but he held hostility and murderous intent.

"Excuse me....."

Nina planned to ask her and understand everything. She had many things she wanted to ask. About the Wolf Faces. About Leerin being taken away. But Claribel hadn't given any answers. No. Nina had been forcibly taken in Claribel's direction rather than Claribel trying to divert the conversation. Anyway, Nina hadn't gained any useful information from her. This was the time to prevent the Wolf Faces from assassinating the Heaven's Blade successors but Claribel wasn't impatient at all.

Still, there was one thing Nina had to ask. Otherwise she wouldn't have the confidence to keep on working with Claribel.

"What is it?" Claribel watched her. She wasn't on guard with Nina.

"Claribel....."

"Please call me Clara. People I'm familiar with me call me that. Speaking of which, don't you find my name hard to say?"

"Ah, well....."

"What is it?"

"That is.....What do you want with Layfon?"

"I want to defeat him."

A very honest and quick reply.

"Ah, yes, please don't misunderstand. It isn't something to do with a personal grudge or the sense of justice of a Military Artist."

"Then what is it for?"

"Please don't think this is my personal thinking. Military Artists in Grendan who are the same age as me all have Layfon as their goal. He's the youngest Heaven's Blade successor."

"But Layfon....."

"Didn't I say it already. Military Artists don't mind him. Of course, this isn't representative of everyone. Please give it a good thought. The underground matches mean there are other Military Artists. It's impossible to imagine there are many illegal Military Artists from the outside in a place with few visits from roaming buses like Grendan. In that case, many local Military Artists and people who make up the audience are involved. Otherwise it's not possible for trade, isn't that so?"

"That.....isn't unreasonable."

"I've said it many times. Layfon's participation in the underground matches and his intention to kill Gahard Baren in the match weren't something he shouldn't have done, but his action that made people understand the horror of a Heaven's Blade successor. So he must leave Grendan. We've secretly fined the other Military Artists who participated in underground matches."

The horror of a Heaven's Blade successor.

The Queen had said it before too, that this must not be exposed. Nina heard that what pained Layfon were his siblings at the orphanage, knowing he wasn't the pure hero they thought he was. They were angry that the image of the hero they worshiped had been tainted.

"Actually, he could have killed Gahard somewhere other than the match. He could have easily killed him during the night..... Well, this clumsy and stupid living style is also....."

"Uh?"

Unusually, Claribel's words turned unclear.

"No. Nothing. Anyway, us Military Artists of similar ages want his strength. We all see our own potential by looking at him taking the Heaven's Blade. This point alone still makes him the hero to young Military Artists. The reason for his entering the underground matches has been spread. I don't think many people still think he's a bad guy."

"Then that means....."

Layfon's return to Grendan wasn't just a dream?

"So many people want to defeat him."

"What did you say?"

Claribel looked normal but Nina felt the topic had suddenly changed.

"Because he's very strong. So this wish to fight him is not wrong . Surpassing Layfon is our important goal in life for us Military Artists who are the same age as him."

Claribel didn't notice Nina's shock.

Had Nina herself felt the same thing?

No. How many Military Artists in Zuellni had thought the same ? Of course some wanted to be like him. A large number of students gathered everyday after the platoon match, hoping he could teach them. Though Layfon himself wasn't keen, the flow of students neither lessened nor stopped. And no one had tried to challenge Layfon in a duel. Nina too. She wanted to be strong like him even now but she had never thought of defeating him. Layfon was also Zuellni's student. He was in her team and he was a friend , a comrade. Though Nina's goal was to keep improving, Layfon wasn't someone whom she had to defeat.

She just wished for his strength.

(This is.....)

Why Grendan's Military Artists were strong. Their wish wasn't limited to the definition of respect and hoping that they could one day reach Layfon's level but the wish was directly connected to the term "surpass". So was that why Grendan's Military Artists were so strong?

".....So that's why Clara wants to fight Layfon?"

"Yes."

Claribel confirmed in a carefree manner.

The two of them hadn't halted their steps as they walked.

"Ah?"

Claribel nodded innocently and turned around.

"What is it?"

"Nothing. I thought there's something else. I see. So that was what it was."

She didn't understand her meaning.

"What is it?"

"Ah, sorry. Seems we have to split up here."

"What did you say?"

Her sudden word made Nina speechless.

"I'm really sorry but there's something I have to do. I think you don't have to worry I'll get killed but if you don't feel well, my conscience would feel bad. And I don't know whether Her Majesty would complain about it, so please take good care of yourself. It's fortunate that you're on our side and you have the Haikizoku to protect you. It should be all right. You'll be safe."

Claribel spoke without stopping as Nina thought. Nina was speechless.

"Then, keep at it."

Claribel suddenly jumped. She was suddenly on a roof nearby and the next second, she was gone.

"......What?"

That was all Nina could manage. She was suddenly left behind in an unfamiliar street on Grendan. Uneasiness rushed up in her as she looked around.

What had Claribel noticed?

Nina stood on the spot, thinking of what she should do next.

(Let's just take this opportunity.)

This was a good chance to return to Zuellni. It was impossible to take Leerin back as the Queen was with her. She couldn't win against Lintence even using the Haikizoku's power – He was the top among Heaven's Blades. This meant he was stronger than Layfon but Layfon had said that the Queen surpassed all Heaven's Blades. She herself could have been killed within seconds in the fight against Lintence. No way she could win against the Queen.

She carefully thought of her strategies but Grendan was too unfamiliar to her.

(Anyway, the most important thing now is to meet up with Layfon.)

She might have gone to save Leerin alone if she was the past Nina. Sometimes her strong sense of mission made her lose control of herself. She understood it too but she could not control herself once she pressed the button of mission.

Maybe Claribel pulling her along had enabled her to escape that situation and calmly think about her next action. It seemed the person monitoring her was still around. She felt she could manage. At least, escaping wasn't a problem. She still remembered the direction of Zuellni from her vantage point in the palace. Perhaps she could escape by running in that direction.

(That's decided.)

No point standing here once she had her plan. Nina prepared to run for Zuellni.

Kei moved at the same time but it didn't come from Nina. In a split second, it created a huge circle with Nina in its center. The pressure of Kei made her experience the illusion of receiving an impact. She stopped moving.

"Wh, what?"

What she felt was the remnants of a strong Kei. It had surrounded her in a split second and cancelled out something. She wasn't sure what it was but something had happened in that split second and then had quickly ended.

Her hands naturally held the Dites and restored the iron whips.

Something was coming. The sense of premonition in her expanded.

The sound of wet footsteps from somewhere arrived at the moment when the limit was near. It was the sound of something stuck to the shoes. It was a very soft sound but it couldn't escape a Military Artist's ears.

Behind her.

Nina turned around. A cold sensation flowered in her chest the moment she saw him. She had seen him close to the Queen when she lost to Lintence and was close to losing her consciousness.

"Yo."

His voice carried a heavy atmosphere. The easy and floating manner he had when they first met was now hidden.

"Dixerio.....Senpai?"

"Ah, yes."

It was hard to accept even with his admittance. His image was completely different from his first image.

"Well, it can't be helped that you feel different from the last time . My mood is different from that time. What I want to see might have appeared. I've become much more naïve while anticipating it. "

Naïve. Was this atmosphere suitable to the meaning of that term?

She couldn't put down her weapon. The Dixerio before her was anything but good. Her heart still held tension. The cold sensation seemed to want to suck out all the heat in her body.

"Senpai, what do you want to me?"

"Well, from all areas. You got involved because of my miscalculation. Though it's a joke for me to feel guilty, I'm definitely feeling it. But it's not my style to apologize."

His left hand held the chain of the watch hanging before his chest. Nina could clearly see the dry blood on his fingertips.

"Senpai, what did you just do?"

"Uh? The people monitoring you are in the way so I put them to sleep temporarily."

Temporarily? Put them to sleep? Was it really that? Dixerio didn't respond to the question in her eyes. She was expecting him to say lightheartedly "Don't look so skeptical. I was joking."

But he didn't.

"It doesn't matter what happened to them. If you don't have anything else to do then I'd take you back to Zuellni. Besides, they'll be in chaos. It's something that will happen sooner or later."

"How so....."

"Don't worry. You'll forget it anyway."

His words shocked her. Was this his original personality? Had he been pretending all along?

"It is troublesome isn't it? So I'll get rid of it."

And suddenly.

"!"

A sudden storm appeared before her. Nina swung the iron whips. The sound of hard things clashing pierced the sky. Dixerio quickly moved to her. Three successive strikes with the iron whips caused sparks to fly.

"Why!?"

"Didn't I say it when we first met? I give everything I can to take what I want. This means I'm going to cancel the debt of getting you involved right here."

Dixerio's Kei continued to expand as the two of them competed with their strength. Should she avoid it? She couldn't. The pressure on her wrist had not changed. If she moved, the huge metal whip of his would kill her.

In that case.

Internal Kei variation – Kongoukei.

Kongoukei received the external Kei releasing from Dixerio's body. The two Kei clashed and rebounded, causing the two to separate.

"Why must we fight!"

"It's something that would end in a split second if you don't resist."

"Give me an explanation."

"You'll forget anyway!"

Kei was increasing during the conversation. She couldn't let her guard down in this situation. Nina gave up holding back her Kongoukei and allowed her Kei to expand.

"You're so stubborn."

"You forced me to!" she shouted and rushed him but he was quicker than her.

No. Don't get confused. But this hesitation had slowed down her actions. Dixerio didn't hesitate. The Kei running in her made the Kongoukei again strike a path similar to the one she made before. The impact created in the iron whips crossed in front of her was like the touch of electricity, numbing her body.

This was Raijin. Dazzling purple electricity ran madly around Nina.

"Wu....."

"Never would have thought you could withstand that."

The expressionless cold voice retreated. Dixerio took a few steps back. He put some distance between them and prepared for Raijin again. As Nina's action was dependent on his attack mode, all she could do was to rely on Kongoukei to receive the next impact. Impacts came one after another without stopping.

She couldn't defend all of them. Dixerio's Raijin created a tiny opening in her Kongoukei, accumulating her injury. This made her shiver. She'd lose at this rate. She tried to suppress the innate anxiety rising in her.

(In this disadvantageous situation.....)

But Dixerio had retreated again to prepare the third Raijin while she was thinking of her strategy.

Kongoukei. The iron whips crossed before her deflected the attack. But this time she gave up the notion of receiving the attack and deliberately let her weapons fly. The huge iron whips fell hard on the ground after losing their goal and created a huge explosion. She adjusted her position according to the Kei flow to avoid the flying debris.

The distance was just right. Dixerio prepared to release Raijin as she expected. He stupidly rushed her.

"Believe in yourself. Step out without confusion and deal your enemy a decisive strike."

She suddenly recalled Dixerio's words for her when he demonstrated Raijin. There was no trick. A serious fight was just the repetition of one's strongest technique. One didn't have to use strange moves no matter how delicate a change the battle experienced. The strategy was to attack decisively and stop the opponent from using their strategy. Inability to carry this out meant defeat and weaving a counter strategy also meant defeat. Inability to last was also defeat. She had to utilize all the potential in her in a fight that was overwhelming in the favor of her enemy. Though it felt stupid, she had to attack to keep testing her boundaries.

And this was the essence of Raijin.

"In that case!"

If he planned to give all he could then she could only react accordingly.

She felt the Kei vein. The creature called Kei. Layfon had said this before. The Kei vein spreading around the waist would hurt. The stirring created shook the entire body. This was Kei cycling in the body, and next was to spit it out and turn it into destructive, rumbling energy called external Kei. Allow the sound and the stirring to be deeper and greater.

No. She had to do this.

Dixerio smiled as he made the same stance. A cruel smile. Only people who had stepped into the marshland of pointless massacre had this smile. Nina was now in the marshland too.

Was he laughing about this or that he was soaking in running Kei?

"That's great. You've got great preparation."

She thought he would rush her but he continued, smiling. " What do you want to do?"

The Kei releasing from his body suddenly increased. Nina didn't want to be careless. She increased the amount of her Kei too and seriously asked.

"Why must we fight? What's happened? Why are you trying to kill me?"

"Nothing much. Besides, I don't want your life.....But. Yes, it's my mistake to get wild all of a sudden."

"Then put down your weapon."

"That depends on you. I give you two choices. One is to fight me here. Two is to accept my suggestion."

"What?"

"I won't accept any other answer. I didn't expect a perfect ending from the beginning. Do you understand? A movie's happy end is when everyone tolerates something and receives happiness. Or, the bad parts are all left outside the camera. I'm not interested in fortune that is given to everyone. Only two choices are available according to my suggestions. Originally you should be working for me. Either way, you should only have two endings. Either get beat up by me and I take you away or follow my instructions honestly."

"....."

His ridiculous theory made her speechless.

Dixerio Maskane from the City of Strong Desire. He introduced himself such when he first met her, fighting the Wolf Faces. He had also called himself a pirate. He had carved the words "Seek it, if through sheer strength" in the statue in front of the Student President building.

This was the image he had left for them.

But Nina felt this wasn't it. No. Had she thought of it? He had taught her his move without holding it for himself. He had not

forgotten her even when fighting the Wolf Faces. It felt like he was worried about her. She had always thought he was such a man.

".....What do you want to take from me?"

"Memory."

"What?"

"I've to take away your memories about the Wolf Faces. Nothing much. Just then your complete memory would get a bit chaotic. It might make you emotionally unstable but you just have to tolerate it and it'd pass. It'd gather in the deepest recess of your memory with time. You should be right in about five years time."

"Just what are you saying?"

"I want to release you from this battle. You can thank me."

"If you could have done it, why didn't you do it at that time?"

"It's easy to remove it if the connection is shallow but you saw that guy's true face and had contact with the Aurora atoms on the mask. They are the source of those guys. Pollutants have become the past substance that belongs to the other side of this world. It's not that easy to cancel the cause and effect of contacting this thing. It's a pity to create memory loss but being a good person is the source of failure."

"How....."

She didn't know what to say.

Take away her memory. Remove all memory she had about the Wolf Faces. Was this related to what was about to happen in Grendan? Could she only be an ignorant observer?

"Why.....Why let me know of it only now? Why did you hide it from me before?"

Perhaps Nina still didn't know anything now. About the origin of this world, the existence of Saya and Airen, the two's tragic fate and the fight with Ignasis in order to create an opportunity for this world. The fighting style had continued to change from then till now, and a large-scale war would break out in the near future.

That was all she knew. But what would the war be like, how large a scale would it be and just what would happen in the end? Would the world really be destroyed if Ignasis won? Or would victory be the end and the stubborn will of Electronic Fairies would continue to survive. Then the war in the near future might just be a frontline war.

And what were the Electronic Fairies' expectations on Nina? What expectations did they hold for Nina who had become a vessel for Melnisc?

"Why are you only saying it now!"

The wind of fury rose among confusion.

The platoon matches. The commotion after the end of the platoon match with the 1st platoon. At that time, Melnisc had possessed Nina and Nina had then jumped to Myath. Urged by a

sense of mission, her body moved on its own to fight the Wolf Faces though she knew nothing of the situation. She was confused and troubled, and she couldn't honestly share the details of this event with anyone. She couldn't even explain why she suddenly went missing. She might get other people involved if she told them . Nina hadn't said anything carelessly as even she herself wasn't sure of the situation.

What were the Wolf Faces? What was their purpose?

She didn't understand in the past. She still didn't understand everything now. But then she really didn't get anything back then. Though she didn't get it at present, she was right here. Right here in Grendan. Along with the creation of the world, the story of enemies, and the purpose of the Electronic Fairies who had shown themselves to her..... She finally began to understand, realizing the purpose of herself and gradually clearing the direction she should walk.

"Finally... Finally I'm beginning to understand, yet you, you....."

Nothing was more important than "What can I do" to Nina who was tortured by a sense of impotence. This man appeared before her to say such things at such a key moment, blocking her way and stealing her hope.

Dixerio Maskane. This man was the one who led her into the deep pit.

"You bastard. You're acting however you want!"

Dixerio was indifferent to her anger.

"Don't worry. You won't care after forgetting."

Nina couldn't understand his heart. Dixerio, who said these words with such thick skin.

Things she didn't understand.

"..... Are you still insisting on this?"

"Of course. That's my style."

"Then I've decided."

She tided the messy flow of Kei and gathered the Kei. The stirring of her Kei vein increased her speed without limit. Rise high. Because this body was strong and wouldn't fall. Strong and wouldn't be torn apart.

"I too will act by my willfulness."

The Kei density had increased to a level she hadn't experienced before. It hadn't reached the level of when she fought the giants, relying on Melnisc's strength, but she had never experienced this amount of Kei being produced by herself.

"I was dragged into the fight since meeting you. I was even brought here. Who would let you pull me around as you wish when I've reached here? Who would ignore this! I'll walk the path with my own strength from now on. Who would see your side of it ?"

She wasn't just talking to Dixerio. She meant the Electronic Fairies too. Melnisc's resolve had also just been conveyed. They hadn't mentioned anything about their plan. They didn't even say anything about the responsibility that Nina was to shoulder.

Nina was ignored. Were they just using her as a good tool?

No. Perhaps not. Forget Senou and Grendan. At least she couldn't believe that Zuellni would do this. But Dixerio's attitude now had turned her confusion into fury. She felt these people who knew of the truth of this world were showing off their advantage and planning to control her.

"If there's danger in this world, then I'll use my own strength to fight it."

"..... I originally wanted to talk over this peacefully."

The pressure from Dixerio hadn't changed. It was neither messy nor shaky. Its density and amount continued to increase. His expression also wasn't as haughty as before. His icy gaze stared at Nina.

"Someone as serious as you isn't suitable to appear in this drama. You'll definitely be angered into a mess. I say it would be better for you to forget everything."

"It's my business to forget or not. I'm also the one who gets angry. You don't have to decide it."

"Can't be helped."

Dixerio rested the metal whip on his shoulder, looking as if he was full of openings. No. This was simply an attack pose – to rush her, raise his whip and swing down.

It was only meaningful to execute the move in this mood.

Similarly, Nina raised her iron whips. Two metal whips – his weapon was the same as hers but it was nothing to him to have to control both whips. Nina was searching for the suitable fighting stance. But her level was still far from his. The essence of Raijin, a gambling move. She couldn't fight him on par if she kept thinking of how to protect herself.

She slowly changed her pose, pulling back the left iron whip. She had extended it in preparation for his sudden attack, and guided it down to cross with her right iron whip. She bunched up her body as if she was tightly bounding herself. And like this, she received Dixerio's attacks who was swinging down from left and right.

The stance she took in this crisis was a gamble. She only learned how to use Raijin in the recent fight in Zuellni. Her current action was foolish in a situation with nowhere to escape. But she'd return to her old impotent self if she was defeated here and lost her memory, leaving her to only watch the events from Zuellni.

(Would that be it?)

Then don't get stuck in the uneasiness of changing stances. Her best choice now was to use the most advantageous stance in this fight to suddenly move forward.

Her density of Kei was increasing unbelievably. Would it explode in her body at this rate...? A wave of uneasiness suddenly began.

Almost at the same time.

Combined Internal and External Kei variant, Raijin.

Two lightning strikes hit each other. The destructive balls of light clashed and made their surroundings explode, sending the two fighters flying.

"Wu....."

Her internal Kei instantly eliminated the numbness of her body. The shock didn't hurt. This wasn't because of the numbness. This was proof that the match of external Kei had ended. The strength of the rebound had been swallowed as the two strikes clashed, swallowed each other and exploded intensely. The numbness she felt just then was created by the clash of the explosion.

(One more time!)

After being sent flying by the mad storm, she instinctively increased her Kei once more. She had already grasped hold of the fighting approach of Raijin. She must keep on fighting without stopping until she defeated him or he defeated her. This was the

correct way to use Raijin. She didn't feel she had defeated him in her last move. This meant he must be preparing for the next attack.

The stance of Dixerio who stood on the opposite side of the screen of smoke...

Raijin.

Release. Run. She didn't feel anything other than the time when she first stumped on the ground. Her entire concentration was on the weight of the iron whips in her hands, and then she poured Kei into them. She wasn't planning to swing her weapons. Her entire body had become part of the iron whips, breaking through in order to defeat her enemy.

Clash. Explode. Fly.

(One more time!)

Repeatedly.

Increase her Kei. Adjust her pose. And release.

(One more time!)

Repeatedly. Her feeling for her whole body was becoming hazy. She couldn't tell what her expression and body condition were like . She was totally immersed. Immersed in what? Defeating Dixerio? Or releasing Raijin?

Clash. This time it didn't explode immediately. Were the two powers resisting each other? The Kei of the two fighters was

gathered in between the three whips. The boundary limiting the explosion was being controlled by the delicate pressure.

"Really, you've shown unbelievable growth," Dixerio murmured, only inches from her.

"But I know. This is what it means to detach from oneself. This is what it's like to open the lock in your heart. Who decides the thing called a limit? Not anyone else but yourself. You've released your rope right now. Be careful when you return to normal. Don't lose yourself."

The pressure between the two twisted, causing the explosion. The light of Kei shot into the sky as Nina leapt back.

(One more time!)

Who cared what Dixerio was saying. Continue to let Kei run and increase the density of Kei in her Kei vein. Use that stirring to make the entire world vibrate. Attack all who manipulated the ignorant Nina as she bet on her existence.

"But remember. There won't be a next time," Dixerio said in a low voice.

In the next second, something had covered his face. A mask. A Wolf Face mask. Yes. Nina didn't know why he was wearing this mask the time when she saw him from Zuellni.

Why was it a mask of the Wolf Face?

"You!"

Was he one of the Wolf Faces? Was he not Dixerio? Was he an imposter?

"I'm neither an imposter nor a spy of the Wolf Faces," he cut her off.

Kei was about to explode as it increased. A layer of blue light surrounded him as its strength continued to grow. The stirring released by that light caressed Nina's skin. Something appearing behind him entered her sight.

(Um.....)

A voice coming from who knew where accompanied the sound of moaning. She realized immediately it was Melnisc's voice. Melnisc may disappear again, judging from the attitude in the dream, but the Haikizoku was still in Nina's body.

But..... Could it be.....

"Yes..... Haikizoku."

"The vessel of a Haikizoku." "the original Electronic Fairy." "To have such an experience." ..... Claribel's voice sounded in her head. Was this what she meant? Dixerio had to fight the Wolf Faces because he was also possessed by a Haikizoku?

A cloud of dark fog appeared behind Dixerio and a dry hand reached out from it. Delicate and long fingers as that of a female's reached out to Dixerio's neck. The fingernails entered his skin.

It looked as if the hand was reaching out, full of hatred, in order to squeeze him to death.

Blue flame. The light of Kei enveloped Dixerio. The same light enveloped Nina, but Nina could only think of it as the light of a ghost.

"Melnisc!"

The Haikizoku slumbering in Nina's body stirred at her shout. Its attitude was hesitant and indecisive in the dream, yet it was reacting to her voice.

"Lend me strength."

(Understood. But you have to be careful. This man has conquered the hungry wolf of extreme flames.)

Who cares.

No time to consider Melnisc's words. Blue light also surrounded her. Her Kei had suddenly increased.

"Tsk. You can use it as you wish already? But....."

Dixerio moved. Nina also executed her technique accordingly.

Combined Internal and External Kei variant, Raijin.

The pressure and atmosphere that were totally different from before made Nina lose herself for a split second. It might not even be a second. She swiftly used her body, strengthened by internal

Kei, to grasp hold of the situation. Dixerio was somewhere near. The feeling of the metal whip was sent to her arms. She would rush in to confirm his position rather than cutting the air apart.

Dixerio swung down the whip.

As if to match her breathing, Nina once again raised the two iron whips. Bright blue traces of Kei followed the two whips.

The result came within one second as expected.

An incomprehensible feeling came to Nina the moment she raised the iron whips. It was a feeling of being able to keep extending her iron whips as the pressure kept increasing. She felt more relaxed because the Haikizoku helped to increase her Kei. Originally, the increasing speed would add another burden to the whips but right now, she was given the strength to overcome that difficulty. She had had this feeling before at somewhere else. Just where and what was it..... She couldn't quite tell. Just hold her weapons tight, pour Kei into them, the feeling spreading through her entire arms, the feeling of resisting something in the air, moving her center of gravity. Everything felt different.

Something made her feel that this shouldn't be what it felt like.

The uneasiness called forth by this feeling became reality in the split second as the three weapons crossed together.

The voice was so clear. The sight before her was unbelievable.

The blue light of Kei gradually scattered as it rebounded. Her arms, the weight suddenly lifted from her, felt so uncomfortable as if her arms had been torn off. Unable to accept this reality, Nina's spirit was conquered by emptiness.

Dixerio's metal whip attacked as if to tear through the emptiness.

Instinctively, Kongoukei ran through her entire body. But the timing was delicate. The huge amount of Kei in the iron whips had already reached Nina before she used Kongoukei and then it entered her body. Like the name given to the technique, Nina's entire body was exposed to the running of lightning.

They had broken and were sent flying. She had been staring at her lonely arms. Something was left in her tight fists. She was holding just the handles of her iron whips.

He had shattered them.

She never thought she would lose in strength.

She felt like she was in an intense current as she hit the ground.

"Ah!"

The air exuding from her mouth was mixed in with a fog of blood. She couldn't breathe. She didn't know whether her lungs had gone numb or that the attack had stopped her lungs from

functioning. Intense pain flooded her chest. This was the only place that hurt. Though she hadn't received all of the impact, her organs had received a huge shock.

"Did you think simple Dites could bear your Kei?"

Her sight was red. Maybe the capillaries in her eyes had burst. Dixerio even looked red to her as he bent down to look at her.

Her lungs were managing. But she couldn't think properly as she lacked blood. Her fingers and skin were numb as if she had suffered an electric shock. Her body couldn't move. Her body and consciousness couldn't react to the sudden change. Just what had happened? No. She knew very well. But why..... why had this feeling conquered her now?

She couldn't feel anything but the numbness in her arms. No, not just her arms. It was her entire body. The disappointment of being unable to feel her weapons took hold of her entire heart. The image of shattered weapons was craved deeply into her brain. Unable to fade.

The weapons had failed to bear her Kei.

Was that what had happened? No. She knew very well. This had happened to Layfon too. Harley had said that only a Heaven's Blade could display all of Layfon's potential. That was why he wanted to hold the Dite that Leerin had brought to him. Even though it still failed to help him use his true strength, at least he hoped to use the techniques he honed when he was a child.

This meant he was forgiving himself as he confronted his past.

Layfon hoped to use his strength better as he continued to fight. Actually, this was just Nina's thought as she wanted to bring him back into the battlefield.

But she never thought the same thing would happen to her.....

No. The impact she felt now. The emptiness conquering her heart and the memory of her weapons being destroyed. Not just that.

The feeling of her iron whips had disappeared. The feeling of the iron whips that she had held for a long time since the time she started training in Military Arts. She had always wanted to have the weapons that her father used. Her father, who was able to elegantly wield the crude weapons. That feeling was gone. A weapon was just a weapon. Even the iron whips she made now were made by Harley. Speaking of which, she had kept changing her iron whips since coming to the Academy City. This was due to many different reasons that made the whips unusable. But the iron whips that she loved so much shouldn't have had received this impact.

Then why?

"Right. This time, disappear," Dixerio said faintly as he spread his hand. His five fingers closed in on her in her red vision.

(Right.)

Why such an impact?

It wasn't just because her weapons were destroyed.

It was because the thought that was poured into the iron whips had been twisted.

Zuellni had felt it in the depth of the city.

This was the city's Mechanical Department. Zuellni had been staying here, never straying. She had also stayed here as she communicated with Schneibel through the En system. She was currently unable to leave as she had to repair the city.

But she felt it. The voice that made her shake. A keening voice filled with pain and sadness. The feeling of not wanting to go made the voice louder and harsher.

Zuellni must maintain the city's functions as an Electronic Fairy. The damage to the feet was hindering its movements. Only one leg was broken on the surface but the impact of the shock had caused abnormalities to many internal areas of the Mechanical Department. Though the city could still move, it didn't have the speed it needed to evade filth monsters. Its balance was also worse

than before. If the city kept moving, it'd bring inconvenience to the people in it.

Hence she must finish the repair as quickly as possible. Zuellni didn't want the young people in this city to get caught up in the events that were to come.

But she felt it.

Nina.

Zuellni flew a few circles above the Mechanical Department.

Should she go? Or stay?

She couldn't go. As an Electronic Fairy, and as one who had a huge connection to the fate of this world, she couldn't forget her own mission. Her mission was to ensure the survival of the people in this city. That was why she was born and sent adrift in this world. This was the consciousness of the Electronic Fairy of self-managed Regios – the Electronic Fairy's mission.

But she was confounded.

Zuellni was slowly growing away from her puerile appearance through the strength she obtained from Farune. According to her age, she should have grown more. But in reality, her image had only grown up a little. Though what her appearance was like meant nothing to an Electronic Fairy, it was special for Zuellni who had kept her puerile appearance for a long time.

Perhaps she had grown a little now that she had obtained some strength. The functions hidden in the strength had also been upgraded. The self-repair ability of the Academy City had apparently been upgraded. Though it still took time to repair the leg, the repairing of the abnormalities in the control system should be fine at this rate.

The students responsible for the repair of the Mechanical Department had been running around because of that too. Even if she didn't do it for the effort of them, Zuellni must stay here and concentrate on repairing the city.

But.....

"Being too honest is a cute side of yours but it's also your weakness."

The sudden voice resounding in the air gave Zuellni a shock. She flew high to look for the owner of that voice.

A girl sat on the round top of the Mechanical Department. It was Nelphilia.

"There's no need to get deeper into it, is there?"

She reached out her hand to Zuellni, who was facing a girl of the night's light. She hugged Zuellni as if they were bound together then she put her beautiful face, beauty that would make one shiver, close to hers.

"Electronic Fairies should finish their mission. You understand this too. Why do you care so much for that girl?"

"....."

"Ah. That's true. I also lent her my strength. I gave her back the Haikizoku I took from Saya."

"....."

"Why? It's simple. Because I want to see. See what? You'll know. "

But Nina now was.....

"Yes. It'd leave her at this rate. But perhaps not so. You understand her personality well? She won't yield even if she loses her memory. Well, there may be some side-effects as he's the one doing it. If you're really worried then follow me. It's simple to eliminate the after effects."

"....."

"Aa, you aren't accepting this either? What a troublesome child. But what would you do? I'm sorry. All I can do for you is follow her. You should know I'm not in my normal state right now. The hole in the sky is another matter. Oh, Sheniebel may not leave this situation alone."

Zuellni stared at Nelphilia, who was quite happy with this. Why was she here? She should be in Grendan, to witness with

Sheniebel and others the event that Dixerio was going to make happen.

Why did she appear before Nina?

"Have you figured it out?"

Nelphilia's beautiful smile did not disappear.

"But Zuellni is the most important to me now. I'd abandon that child if you were in danger. I won't lose my priorities."

Zuellni considered her words. Considering what was most important and what she herself wanted to do. She pondered and pondered...

Nelphilia gazed at the flying Zuellni, who was hovering as she thought. An icy and beautiful smile adorned her face. It felt as if one would fall into a demonic trap if one was to look at her.

But there was just a bit, a bit of warmth in her smile. Warmth seeped through her gaze that was watching Zuellni.

Icy yet warm. The two contradictory expressions watched Zuellni.

Zuellni's gaze flew in the air as she pondered.

The original people and those who now lived here. Which side was more important? Which side should she respect?

Different opinions causing bloodshed had occurred in this city. Zuellni had taken the role of an observer back then. It was important to ensure their survival but she had never interfered with the way they lived. Electronic Fairies only needed to move according to the principles set down for their own cities.

But now she was confounded. Why?

The reason was Nina. The girl whose body the Electronic Fairies thirsted for. Zuellni was confounded because of her.

Was that it? Was that really it? Was that why she was confused? Did she think her luck had made her meet Nina? Did she think Nina was a convenient tool?

No. It wasn't like that.

"Is that the conclusion as expected?"

Zuellni flew back to Nelphilia and said that in a low voice with a bitter smile.

"....."

"I know. That's why I'm here. This is all because of you, Zuellni. I can be here because of you. That's why I can exist in this world. Because you've lent me your strength, I can survive till now."

She reached out her hand to caress Zuellni's face, curling up her hair. Physicality meant nothing to an Electronic Fairy. This manifestation was temporary, caused by the gathering of

electronic atoms. But whether it was Zuellni or other Electronic Fairies, Electronic Fairies tended to grow according to the aspects of the initial appearance they obtained. They could control their appearance so they didn't need to grow. But for some reason, the reality was different. Was it because the original possessed a real body? Or that an appearance meant something to Zuellni and the other Electronic Fairies?

This appearance was proof of Zuellni's identity. It was the same as Grendan and Melnsic who could change their appearance according to their heart.

"Then let me convey your intentions."

"....."

"No need to be so surprised. You can't leave the city because you need to repair it right? You need someone to convey your message but you don't want to drag the students of this city into the event, right?"

"....."

"Then only I can do this. It's not a difficult job for me anyway. Why so surprised?"

"....."

"Ah. You mean him? I don't plan to stand by his side. Because this is my style. And....."

She stopped halfway. The smile disappeared from Nelphilia's mouth. The girl of night stood up.

"Perhaps this is the last time we meet. Whether it's life or death, I'll fly through the hole as soon as it appears in the sky. The time spent connecting with that other hole was too short so I couldn't absorb anything. But it's enough to make my body move. In that case, I'll probably not see you again. Whether this world is to be destroyed or not, I've to carry out my plan as long as things are progressing. Eliminate the insult I felt at that time. I've given you trouble in the past so this is the least I can do for you."

Zuellni hugged Nelphilia as she looked at her expressionless face.

"....."

"Thanks. Only you would say something genuine to me."

"....."

"Uh, yes. We'll hug again when that time comes."

Nelphilia opened her arms and Zuellni flew to the sky again. The hand of the young girl pointed to the empty space and then there was an explosion of light.

Intense light conquered the Mechanical Department and then it gathered together. A square appeared in front of Nelphilia. It lost its light and gradually sank. The girl of night received it.

"..... It's great I've lent her my power. Same as him. But what that girl needs isn't me. It's your smile."

Zuellni smiled at her. The girl of night replied with a bitter smile.....

"Farewell. The time I spent with you was really happy."

Disappeared. Leaving Zuellni to hover on top of the Mechanical Department. She concentrated on repairing the city again and never noticed she had returned to her puerile form.

The widespread hand continued to close in through her red vision. The illusion of the end came to Nina. If Dixerio meant what he said , then she wouldn't die. But right now, she might die. The memory she possessed would die. She had been inexplicably dragged into this mess and inexplicably pushed away. She might be able to imagine it if it had been something else. But never this. Same as Dixerio, she had struggled in pain, tasted bitterness, wanting to tell someone of her experience so much that she couldn't sleep.

Her memories were all painful.

Even so, she couldn't comprehend why he wanted to push her out now.

The natural reason was that she got caught in the whole thing but the more important thing was that this was Grendan. She would end up dragging Layfon into it.

Nina was the one who forced him to enter the battlefield again. Of course, that wasn't just it. It was also because Zuellni was in a crisis, and Karian knew everything about his past. But in the end, the one who made him stand in battle was her. Now that she recalled it, she had once kicked Layfon out of the platoon after knowing his past. Perhaps Karian had done something to interfere with this but he didn't clash with her in the end.

But this was all Nina could think of now. Though it had only been a few months, had she thought of it this way back then?

Back then, she only wanted to do something for Zuellni. So she didn't have the courage to let go of Layfon's fighting strength.

(I got him involved in this.)

This was Grendan. A place of deep meaning to him.

She wished she hadn't been so stubborn with her original intention. She wished the fight with the Heaven's Blade successors had never happened. This way, Leerin wouldn't have come to Zuellni and gotten taken away.

Layfon kept fighting because of Nina. Didn't Karian also say " the reason of the fight is up to you".

Layfon must have come to Grendan. He came to simply bring her back, knowing nothing of the fate she bore. What would he do here? Was he going to jump into the huge fight against the Queen and the Heaven's Blade successors? Without the Heaven's Blade to help him use his full potential, would he also experience her uneasiness as he held the handle of his broken Dite?

Even so, Layfon still.....

(Am I still impotent?)

She had always been like this. She kept thinking ahead but she could do nothing. What had she been able to do during the time when Zuellni was attacked by the larvae? All she did was let Layfon fight.

(How is it pardonable?)

She couldn't be forgiven. She was so unsightly. She wanted to kill herself. Make herself disappear. Surpass her past self and become stronger. She had come to the Academy with this thought. But the current her hadn't surpassed anything. And she never would have thought she would feel so impotent.

Was she to sigh about her impotence in here?

Impotence. This feeling had sustained her actions till now. She had borrowed this thought to sustain herself even though she was

hammered by reality. She had sustained herself till now even though her goal and means didn't match. She had sustained herself even though she was dragged into an unexpected event.

She had gritted her teeth and endured even though she had lost her direction, feeling uneasy and scared. She had walked to this point though this place wasn't the place she wanted to be in. Was she to lose all that?

(Stand. Stand up. I can't let it end here!)

Her lips quivered. Her limbs had lost their feelings. Her vision was red. She couldn't do anything. But even so.....

(Stand up!)

Her heart hadn't died.

She kept calling herself to stand up as Dixerio's hand moved closer and closer. The faint light of Kei lit up his fingertips. Was this light to take away her memories? What was the difference between losing herself and death?

(Move!)

She called continuously. Even a tiny movement was better than nothing. She had to resist. She should be able to do something even though she had lost the iron whips. She must move to resist that hand, resist Dixerio.

"Let me help you."

A voice sounded in her ears.

(Who is it?)

No. I know this voice. It isn't possible to forget the voice that shakes my core so deeply. No other person would make the same voice.

It was Nelphilia.

Was Nina the only one hearing her? Dixerio's movement didn't change.

"I have something to give you. But unfortunately, this isn't my present."

She only heard her voice. That beautiful form hadn't appeared. Only her voice resounded. But it wasn't enough to stop the effect brought by fear.

(What does she mean?)

"No time for you to hesitate. I have two choices for you. Allow Dixerio to erase your memory or keep moving forward. Though he says the aftermath would affect your memory, I can help with that. "

Nina's brain couldn't quite catch up with her words. Choice. Even this girl was saying the same thing to her.

"I'll give this to you if you want to keep moving forward. But if you choose this, then you're not to start over or stop midway.

Otherwise I'd kill you. I'd make you die in the depths of despair until you understand in the core of your soul how important it is."

Nina couldn't understand her words. Her voice didn't sound playful, the attitude she held when she was underneath Zuellni. Instead, Nina felt anger in her voice.

What was she mad at?

No more time to think. To move forward or to give up.

She had decided.

Hadn't she been thinking what events would transpire if she were to give up and let Dixerio take away her memories?

(I've always just wanted to move forward.)

If she were to regret both choices, she'd rather regret taking the forward path. This was what Nina Antalk was like.

"Uh."

Nelphilia sighed.

"All right. I'll give it to you. The present of the pitiful child who is always giving away for others. The present of the cute child who hasn't even thought of whether you match it. You must take great care of it."

After her words. Something suddenly changed.

"Goodbye. You'll forget me and anything else the next time you wake up."

Dixerio's hand extended to her forehead.

At the time when the hands that held the broken Dites felt the change.

At the time when power once again filled her body.

At the time when her red vision cleared.

At the time when she believed everything was back to normal.

Nina counterattacked. She swung without knowing what she was holding, jumping away from the shocked Dixerio.

"Hey, hey....."

He was confused, shocked and.....

"What kind of a joke is this?"

Furious.

"I won't let you," Nina said and then confirmed the things in her hands.

The iron whips. The iron whips had returned to their original forms. Their appearance hadn't changed but they felt different. They wouldn't break again. There was no proof of this but this was what Nina believed.

The strength living in her body hadn't changed. Melnisc was silently lending her his strength. The pressure of the blue Kei hadn't changed from before. However, she couldn't feel any uneasiness from the blue Kei shining through the iron whips.

This was a sense of peace she had never felt before.

"Perhaps it's your fault for bringing me here."

The ability to fight as she wanted without regret made her feel peace.

"But I'm the one standing here. It's my choice to decide whether to leave or not. This hasn't got anything to do with you."

"It'd have been good had you listened to me when I was in my good mood."

Dixerio rested his metal whip on his shoulder.

"I said already that I'd do my best to get what I want."

"Then I'll do my best to keep moving forward."

She increased her Kei again. Dixerio did the same. The color of the two blue Kei swayed intensely. They stirred, increasing their density as both fighters watched for the timing to release their Kei.

But they didn't.

Dixerio's Kei suddenly scattered and disappeared. He turned the weapon back into its Dite form and put it into his weapon harness while Nina was still confused.

"What do you want to do?"

"I'm not playing. I feel like a fool," he replied, exhausted. He looked like he really had gotten tired of this. "You've wasted my goodwill."

"Goodwill? I can't see it."

If he did it out of his goodwill, then his brain or his knowledge must have undergone some twist.

"Disobedient children need to be educated."

"Stop joking."

"I'm serious."

He scratched his red hair and breathed out a long breath.

"Never mind. Do whatever you like. But don't forget the things you're holding."

His gaze had stopped on her weapons.

But she didn't understand. That voice. This was what Nelphilia had given her. But it wasn't hers. She said she was only here to give it to her.

She looked at the weapons in her hands. The feeling from the weapons was real. It felt the same as the ones that Harley had made for her. She couldn't see any difference.

But this wasn't just it. The Dites wouldn't break even if they were to receive the strengthened Kei of the Haikizoku. This belief stayed with her. And she didn't feel uncomfortable at this event. The belief about the unbreakable Dites had brought along with it a sense of warmth and comfort.

These iron whips were unbelievable.

"You know what they are?"

"..... Think of it yourself."

Dixerio watched her icily. Nina was speechless, pressed down by his gaze.

"This is the second time."

"What?"

"The second time. You've escaped two times to return to normal . It won't happen again. You can only keep on moving forward. You can only move forward with an intention of losing that power no matter what your Haikizoku says. This is what you bear now."

"....."

She couldn't understand his meaning but she didn't ask. His air told her he would refuse all questions she raised.

"..... Well, good luck. I don't have the time to interfere with you."

"Eh?"

"The next time we meet is at Asura Harbor. The place to decide life and death. I won't worry about your safety anymore. I'll kill you if you get in my way. That's all."

He turned around and disappeared into the buildings.

The traces of the battle between the two of them stayed in the unusually quiet street. Nina had separated from Claribel because of the movements in the fight. This meant the fight just then had been very intense. But no one had come to investigate despite the huge ruckus. Everything disappeared after her question.

"What?"

Confounded. This was all she felt. The traces of the battle were disappearing one by one.

"What... What's happening?"

She had no idea. She planned to prepare her fighting stance but Melnisc had stopped her.

(You're back to reality. Stand down and move normally.)

What was going on? Still, it'd be bad if someone saw her like this. She returned the weapons to their Dite form and jumped to the roof of a nearby building like Dixerio.

"What's happened?" she asked.

(The space has shifted and moved away from the real Grendan. You've come to a different place. The twist just then had been repaired. Everything is once again returned to its state in the real space.)

She still didn't understand despite Melnsic's explanation.

(The Wolf Faces are good at twisting space. The disappearance of the twist means the Wolf Faces have been eliminated.)

Must be Claribel and Minse. They won.

"Does that mean the plan to assassinate the Heaven's Blades have been prevented?"

This was it. They were the ones who took away Leerin. Right now, they might be the enemies but they were the ones who attacked the giants. Though the feeling towards them was complicated, the latter meant more to her. Either way, she didn't want the Wolf Faces to have their way.

(Then what next?)

"What do you want to do?"

The Haikizoku's attitude in the dream was vague. He didn't seem to accept the goal of Sheniebel. Dixerio had said something about "with the intention of losing that power". Had he seen through the Haikizoku's intention?

(.....)

The Haikizoku was silent to her question.

"..... Watch my action," she murmured as she watched the palace.

(Don't you plan to return?)

"If anything had to happen to Zuellni, it'd have happened already. I'd rather stay here and observe than do something useless."

Yes.

If it was Layfon, he would do something to rescue Leerin. The words that Sharnid said when they headed for the lab was correct. Layfon feared nothing in Grendan, a place that had gathered Military Artists as strong as him. He'd come here successfully even if he was to fight his way through.

In order to rescue Leerin.

Nina's heart hurt as she thought of this. The injury she received from Dixerio should have disappeared when Nelphilia handed her the iron whips.

Nina pondered. She touched her body and didn't find any traces of injures.

"I've found out Leerin's location. This should help him."

Besides, she must witness the events here.

"Hey, you."

Someone said suddenly as she was deep in thought. Nina turned around and saw a female putting her head out the window of the roof.

"Are you a student of the opposite city? What're you doing standing there?"

"Ah, no. I....."

She was concentrating on her own affairs, neglecting the presence behind her. So unsightly. The more she thought, the more flustered she became. In the end, she couldn't even weave her words properly.

"I don't know what you're doing but don't damage my house."

"Ah, ok. No problem."

The female frankly watched the serious Nina.

"Uh, never mind. By the way, do you have time to spare?"

"Uh?"

So sudden.

"You must be bored because you've been spacing out. I have something I hope you can help me with."

"Ah, no, not at all....."

"Hurry up and come in."

She wasn't even listening. The female opened the window wider and pulled herself back. It seemed she wanted her to enter no matter what.

"Wh, what should I do.....?"

She had asked but the Haikizoku gave no reply. What a heartless guy.

"I say, hurry."

"O, ok."

Reluctantly, Nina entered through the window.

The Queen brushed apart the blue dimness into the Inner Court.

"Leerin!"

The Wolf Faces had appeared to attack her while she was waiting for Leerin. The foolish invaders were eliminated the moment they appeared. She hadn't even lifted a finger. Just the external Kei exuding from her was enough to finish them.

Wolf Faces. She had known of the name of this organization since long ago. She also knew of the fight between Claribel, Minse and the Wolf Faces who had infiltrated Grendan, but she just pretended not to know of it.

Because there wasn't a need for her to make a move before that moment came.

But had that moment arrived? The lamentation she felt when eliminating them only lasted a second. She had quickly switched her mind around, found the opened door and the girl who had entered into this place.

The blue dimness still pervaded. Alsheyra saw the lonely bed. Standing beside it were her friend and the formerly-slumbering girl.

".....Saya?"

Alsheyra had never seen the slumbering girl, as the door to the Inner Court had always been closed. Even so, she was still certain that the girl standing next to Leerin was Saya.

"Sen.... Your Majesty," Leerin said in a low voice. She looked a little confounded as she covered her right eye with her hand. Was she hurt? No. That was impossible.

"Just call me senpai. It's more convenient."

Alsheyra was relieved that she was all right. Her expression softened as she walked over to them.

"Did those guys come here?"

"They did, but it wasn't much of a problem," Saya replied. Her voice, crisp as a bell, echoed merrily in Alsheyra's ears.

"Really....." She looked at Leerin. Leerin was still covering her right eye, watching the direction behind Alsheyra.

She already noticed when she entered the room. Numerous balls were spinning for some reason. She thought they were decorations of this space but they seemed to be something else. She randomly picked up one of the balls. It was just big enough for her to hold in one hand. It was made of glass and looked like it was an eyeball. A circle weaved of thorns was inside the pupil, weaving around a cross.

A pattern that really bothered her.

"..... Saya has awakened. Then it was inevitable that those guys would come. It would be more suitable to explain this as the true beginning."

"It would be better for that to be the case, though that's only my personal feelings."

"What a coincidence. I felt the same not long ago."

She had felt the same, but not now. If possible, she hoped this trouble would have occurred in the next generation after Leerin's. Though she hadn't gathered all 12 people, it was Grendan's first time having gathered so many strong Military Artists. It would be foolish to give up this time and wait for the next chance. Besides, Leerin wouldn't have hoped for that. She wasn't someone who would push trouble to her descendents.

She could stand here because of her personality.

If she could prevent the coming event, she'd even sacrifice her feelings. This thought had never gone away.

"But you wouldn't do that. In that case, we can only let it happen. If the opposite side doesn't plan to, we'll force them. My job is to eliminate it."

"I'm counting on you," Saya bowed. Alsheyra found she had unconsciously put her hand on Saya's head. Doing so, she seemed natural in acting badly.

"Is that all right? No matter what you think, the most important thing to us now is survival."

Saya's face remained expressionless even though Alsheyra's hand was on her head. But a shade of dislike could be discerned from her countenance. The girl of night gazed at Alsheyra, confirming the feeling on her head.

"What should be said was already said. Then do you want to leave here?" Alsheyra asked the two of them.

Leerin nodded lightly, still with a hand on her eye. Saya also confirmed silently.

"Then let us discuss further outside. You must be tired after this ordeal."

"Thank you."

"Don't worry. Leerin is my family too."

"Eh?"

"Leerin's surname will change to Eutnohl from today. There's a crazy uncle but you can just ignore him. Even his relatives do the same."

"But....."

"Of course. You can keep the name Marfes if you like. It really is quite a good name."

Leerin lifted her head, the original serious expression turned into a smile.

"Thank you, but I'll listen to senpai and change my surname to Eutnohl."

The change before the smile didn't escape Alsheyra's eyes.

It was an expression of joy. Tears of joy.

"Then it's probably more suitable for me to call you Your Majesty."

"........Yes."

Included in it was the meaning of saying farewell to her name. The past Leerin Marfes who called her senpai had disappeared. In here was the daughter of fate that the three royal families had hoped for -- Leerin Eutnohl. This was Leerin's own decision.

Sad and painful words had nothing good to offer. Though Alsheyra had never regretted her own fate, she really wanted changes for Leerin, who had to suddenly bear this fate. But the conclusion she could think of was that she could do nothing.

(I'm the useless one.)

"..... Anyway, let's head up."

She couldn't tell what Leerin was feeling, judging by the expression she gave when she praised her Marfes name. But she knew her words hadn't hurt her. Only that point was clear.

The current Leerin had overcome an obstacle and taken one step forward.

When Leerin's thought turned back to reality, Alsheyra Almonise was already behind her.

Claribel felt deeply that she had gone over the limit of her own endurance.

"I can't stand it," she said in a low voice after Kalvan destroyed the practice sword in the dojo. A needle had pierced the handle of the sword. Of course, the needle was poisoned. Claribel pondered as she looked at the broken Dite with her head lowered. A Heaven's Blade successor would never fail to notice the tiny change to his own Dite. Even if he were to spring the trap and the poison spread through his body, he only needed to cut off his arm before his whole body was poisoned. This level of speed and

judgement was the most basic even for a non-Heaven's Blade successor in Grendan. The person could always get a doctor to sew up the arm so no one would hesitate to cut his own arm off.

But one might not be able to control any situations perfectly once this step was taken. This was the end goal.

Let the gears go mad one by one. Things would head for the more advantageous situation this way. The effect wouldn't be too bad.

But in this city existed Claribel and Minse who could sense Wolf Faces. They would never let them have their way here. Claribel would not let them win even if she was to bet on her pride .

The destination was the outer edge of the city. Toss away the Dite there and eliminate all evidence. The students at the dojo, realizing their teacher's Dite was missing, must look very stiff.

Even imagining this scene was no fun.

"I can't stand it," she repeated in a heavier tone.

"Be patient," Minse said, looking at her unhappily.

"It's lucky we're on this side. To swing with that level of Kei will provoke other Military Artists."

Minse didn't look happy because he knew what Claribel was like.

"Don't talk about him. I'm annoyed."

"Didn't it turn out this way because you didn't think before you acted?"

"You're so longwinded."

Minse made annoyed noises, his brows furrowed. A riot aimed at making a stain in the Eutnohl family occurred when Layfon took the Heaven's Blade at age 10. This was done because of Herder's incidence. Another commotion also occurred as a Heaven's Blade was involved.

But the Queen didn't handle it seriously as if it was a big case. After that, she solved the problem with unbelievable power while ordinary citizens still noticed nothing.

In the end, the Eutnohl family had to pay a huge amount as a fine.....

"Thanks to that, it's now a poor family with a royal name."

Claribel laughed at him who had covered his face. Minse thought she would feel better after laughing but it still didn't work as expected. Her expression had turned stiff again. Minse's bitter expression changed.

"Hey, you know? I don't want to be seen as a conspirator."

"Ara. I'm the one taking action. You don't have to worry."

"As if Her Majesty would accept this reason. Besides, the space has returned to normal. This event will not escape Delbone's eyes."

"Never mind."

"Never mind? Either way, we've kept the calm. What would happen if the medicine ignores its original effect?"

"Nobody's designated that mission. We defeated them. The ending is perfect."

Claribel looked at him – this bitter, bored, impatient, anxious cousin who gave off such an expression that was difficult to pull off – had boldly spoken out.

"Besides, we didn't fight because we had an order. Things became like this when we came to. Either way, it's enough that we eliminate them, right?"

Claribel became like this..... her first fight with the Wolf Faces was when she was nine. She decided to learn Karen Kei and so became Troiatte's apprentice. Heaven's Blades never took apprentices because nurturing an apprentice was an obstacle to raising his own strength. Ruimei, who opened his own school, was an exception. Hence, everyone thought it was difficult to become a Heaven's Blade's apprentice. However, Troiatte accepted her with a carefree manner. His belief was that he should be a gentlemen to all women regardless of their age. But Claribel didn't officially become his apprentice. She had to forcibly enter the Military Arts stream that Troiatte hailed from, Nain, so to learn the basics of

Karen Kei. She received his direct instructions after she had trained in the basics for some time. She had trained diligently so she could learn under him sooner.

And it suddenly arrived at that time.

It was so sudden, so unexplainable. She was attacked by the Wolf Faces but she realized after the battle that she was holding her Dite with her pose ready, but she was facing passerby in a daze. Similar incidences occurred since that time. The Wolf Faces stood before her when she reacted, and then she had kept on fighting battles with them.

Nine years old. Judging by how she somehow managed to handle them, those Wolf Faces weren't all that powerful. Claribel hadn't met any strong opponents. Those Wolf Faces were of average strength. Numerous encounters with them gave Claribel opportunities to be creative in the battles. They had become the best opponents to her in terms of fighting a crowd.

And then she had met Minse who was under the same situation as her. He had discovered the purpose of the Wolf Faces. The two of them had worked hard to understand some of the truth. The Wolf Faces' purpose was related to the three royal families. The three royal families of Grendan that were deep in the mystery of the world. Claribel understood that she herself was also deeply involved. "But I won't give up this chance to confirm my strength."

"Then you just need to duel with your master."

"He'll definitely go easy on me."

But Layfon wouldn't be soft in this situation.

"Don't you want to fight too?"

".... You, are only of this level."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you just simply want Layfon to see how much you've grown? It's been about three years right, you and Layfon...."

"It isn't something admirable to talk about a girl's secret that easily."

The pressure in her smile made him breathe in a sharp breath.

She took a deep breath, showing no intention to continue with the conversation. He should already have seen it. This was the outer edge. Though it was very close to the contact point with the Academy City, any interaction or entry was forbidden. Even people with goodwill could only look at the other city from here. There were many who wanted to help the immature people of the Academy City to repair their city. They had observed the other city in details and gone to talk with the palace to release the order. Of course, not all of them did this out of goodwill. Some did it to get a chance to earn money. Some also did it just wanting to join in on the fun.

Anyway, there usually weren't many people here.

There were three males and females entering from the Academy City. She could tell from their uniforms that they were wearing fighting clothes. The Military Artists of the Academy City should still be on alert. Their presence here wasn't anything strange. At least, fighting clothes weren't all that strange to the citizens of Grendan.

Then what were they here for? Claribel's curiosity made her look at them.

"That idiot, coming in here so openly....." Minse said in a low voice.

Claribel was looking at the same person. There was no mistake. It hadn't been a year since he left Grendan. His face wouldn't have changed much. It should still take the citizens some time to recognize him but if there were Military Artists among the crowd, they would have spotted him already.

He was Layfon.

"..... Listen up. I'm returning to the palace immediately. So right now, you stay here and wait for 10 minutes. If you start anything, do it after that time. Understood? This has got nothing to do with me."

Minse jumped for the direction of the palace after leaving those words.

Ten minutes?

Claribel wasn't that patient. But she was grateful that he didn't completely stop her so she waited one minute. She jumped after the time had passed.

Of course, in a direction opposite Minse.

She rushed to stand in front of Layfon.

The girl who dropped from the sky to block his way drew out an image in Layfon's mind.

"It's been a while, Layfon-sama."

"Claribel... sama.....?"

The daughter of the Ronsmier family. Heaven's Blade successor Tigris' granddaughter.

"I'm happy that you still remember me."

Layfon didn't drop his guard even though she was smiling. Even Sharnid could detect the challenge beneath her smile. Layfon wouldn't have missed it.

"Hey....."

He stopped Sharnid from snatching out his Dite.

"You and Felli, please..... senpai, step back. If anything happens, evacuate. Move once you're ready."

Sharnid immediately understood him.

Layfon stood on a spot where he could cover for Felli. Sharnid and Felli stepped back to make some distance between them.

He understood Claribel's meaning.

"Aa, are you planning to win against me?"

"I'm sorry but I'm not in the mood to chat now."

Claribel's hand hovered above the Dite in her weapon harness but she didn't pull it out. The fighting spirit in her continued to rise. It was on the brink of erupting.

"This makes me think of the first time we stood in the same battlefield. As a Heaven's Blade successor, you were my guardian in my first fight."

"Did anything happen? I don't remember."

He had the Sapphire Dite, Shim Adamantium Dite, Adamantium Dite, and the Iron Dite. Which Dite should he use? He thought about it and decided in a split second.

Claribel's expression cooled, affected by the provocation in his words.

"True. It was only one of many fights to you, but to me, it was unforgettable..... I've been only thinking of how to surpass you since that day."

"Really? Then let's have a quick fight. I don't have time to waste on someone like you."

"Yeah. That's enough....."

She only managed to get half of her words out.

Claribel attacked. The afterimage of her standing pose was left behind as she rushed him. The Dite was still in the weapon harness but her fingers were ready to snatch it out anytime. The technique to pull out her Dite. A move without hesitation. Layfon held the Dite he had decided on initially – Sapphire Dite. He had snatched it out while Claribel was shortening the distance between them.

Red and blue, the lights of restoration crossed each other. The cut paths weaved together. The Kei released from the two bodies cut open the sky.

This all happened in one moment.

And then the stirring of the strength of the outpouring Kei linked the outer edges of Grendan and Zuellni.

"Has she gotten serious? That idiot." Minse complained in distaste as he was on his way to the palace.

And the two Military Artists who suddenly entered a fight revealed a rare scene to the speechless citizens and the few Military Artists mixed in the crowd.

Kochouenshiken (Flaming Butterfly Sword). Claribel named this move herself. The twin swords made of ruby Dite danced in the sky. The handle made to guard her fists were of a design that made it difficult to let go of the weapons.

Yet the weapons were dancing in the sky.

They were dancing agilely in the sky with Claribel's arm.

The Sapphire Dite altered by Harley and Kirik made this scenery possible. The swing made at the time of restoration cut out a cut path faster than the one drawn by the scarlet blades of Kochouenshiken. That cut path then pierced through Claribel's shoulder.

The fallen arm slowly fell onto the ground, drawing out a circle.

She rolled down next to Layfon, her stance totally collapsing. Blood continued to flow but her face was red. Her body was numb but words were weaved in between her teeth.

"As I thought, you're the best."

Only Layfon could hear her moans.

But her words failed to stop his steps.

"......Restoration 02."

Claribel wasn't a threat anymore. He turned the Sapphire Dite into the Steel Threads mode.

"Let's go, senpai."

"Ah, Oi, Oi."

Sharnid was too shocked and his reaction was obviously slow. Layfon carried Felli with one arm, holding the handle of the Sapphire Dite in the other hand, and jumped.

The Military Artists at the outer edge only came rushing in now . The speed of the fight was so shockingly fast that even Grendan's Military Artists couldn't react fast enough.

But they managed to restore their Dites after coming to, at the time when Layfon and the two were meters away.

They roared in anger and attacked.

Attacks with Kei intense as flames.

They should have already realized it.

Their opponent was Layfon.

"I won't hold back if you get in my way," he murmured in a low voice as he waved the Steel Threads at them.....

The three of them rushed out of the outer edge.

Epilogue

The feeling of Kei stirring through his entire body made Derek Psyharden frown. It seemed today would be a noisy day. Though it wasn't something depressing, the fact that it prevented him from staying calm must mean it wasn't worth feeling happy about. Besides, he wasn't the only one feeling like this. Almost all Military Artists in Grendan that he had come across had become like this.

Derek had received a sudden summon. Grendan had contacted an Academy City – an incomprehensible contact. It had also sent over a number of Heaven's Blade successors to help them defeat filth monsters. What incredulous information. On top of all of that, this Academy City's name was Zuellni. All reasons for his uneasiness had gathered to Derek. However, what puzzled him was that he wasn't the only person tasting this atmosphere.

He was in the reception room of the palace at the moment. He had been sitting on the sofa and had stood up to look out the window after feeling that running of Kei. Buildings blocked the center of the source of Kei stirring, making its location hard to define, but he could tell it was somewhere close to the contact point. This information made the atmosphere more irritating. Derek could not calm down no matter what. He could feel that familiar Kei though two types of Kei were woven together. He couldn't be wrong. But.....Why?

Doubt deepened the atmosphere around him. He didn't even know who had summoned him, yet he came as his personality would not allow him to ignore the summon. But perhaps this was the time to leave aside his personality.

He heard knocking on the door while he was troubled about it. The servant called his name politely and left to lead the way. And that was how Derek missed the opportunity to leave. He followed the servant.

The atmosphere in the palace was different from usual as he had expected. The dry and nasty feeling reminded him of his old battle days.

(What's happened?)

Why did they summon a retired Military Artist? The more he thought of it the stronger the bad feeling became.

His destination was the room that he last went to, after the event involving Gahard Baren. The door opened and he entered the room. The chair behind the bamboo curtain was gone, replaced by a sofa and a table. The furniture was simple. But what was more surprising was.....

"Leerin?"

His adopted daughter was in the room.

"Father."

"Why are you here?"

Leerin's gloomy face watched him. She wore a blindfold over her right eye for some reason. The leather made blindfold was simple and delicately made. It did not suit her. The covered right

eye was a mismatch to Leerin's face. The image of the innocent girl stained with blood surfaced in Derek's mind.

".....What's happened?"

Leerin's expression revealed everything: what event had transpired, what she had decided. When all of the children reproached Layfon, on the day that his Heaven's Blade successor title was stripped from him, only Leerin stood by his side. On that day, the lonely Leerin wore the same expression.

"Father, can you calmly listen to me? And believe what I'm about to say?"

"Leerin?"

His adopted daughter wanted to say something and he could feel the uneasiness in her words.

"Of course I'll believe you. You're my daughter. You won't lie to me."

".....Thank you," she said. She looked like she wanted to cry but her eye was dry. The strength in her heart had sealed her tears.

"My name's changed to Leerin Eutnohl."

She then told him everything, including the information she had obtained from Saya. She told him what would happen next, her role in the event and what she had to do. Derek crossed his arms in silence. His gaze never left his daughter. He didn't think she was lying, or that he had been deceived. This was the palace,

but more importantly, he could read the atmosphere. It was similar to the atmosphere of Grendan's Military Artists waiting to be released in the battlefield. Once one sank into it, one would wish for an opponent no matter who he was. Derek was in that state when he waited in the reception room. The atmosphere strengthened while no one knew its real source. All Military Artists in Grendan had felt it instinctively. Something big was about to happen but no one knew what. This feeling was special. A feeling, knowing that the battle was here yet there were no enemies.

This was unusual.

"Leerin, let me ask you again."

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and let it out. His lungs expanded and shrank. In this process, the cycling air took away the confusion in him. If this was to become a battlefield, then confusion was useless. It was important to calmly digest the information of this battle. Besides, his daughter was the key to the battle to come. As a parent, he had the duty to make the battlefield the most advantageous to his daughter.

"You don't need Layfon anymore?"

Leerin's reaction was slow. Her expression changed from one to another. Her strong will suppressed it.

"".....Um," she nodded resolutely.

"Layfon is no longer a citizen of Grendan. He cannot be involved in it. I've already decided."

"Even though you still want to see him?"

"Yes."

She didn't look confused. No, she had already suppressed it. Had she chosen to sacrifice herself, or.....

"Then there's only one thing for me to do," he murmured. He snatched out the Dite from his weapon harness and restored it.

Leerin watched the Katana in his hand.

"Father?"

"Since he's here, words alone cannot stop him."

The stirring he felt just then.....It really was Layfon. His adopted son had come to take back his sibling. Words could not stop him who came with that purpose in mind.

"To hurt him with this Katana or to be hurt. Either way, this is the only thing I can do."

"No....." Leerin didn't know what to do.

He smiled. "Military Artists are stupid creatures, especially my son. He's like me. I'm sorry."

"But....."

"Don't you want to stop him? I've decided. I don't plan to kill him but would this naïve thinking work?"

He smiled. A more carefree smile than before. Thinking that he could do something for his children with this old body made him happy.

"I'm proud of him. You too, Leerin."

He stood up and caressed her hair.

"Father....."

"It's my fortune to be able to do something for you and his decision."

"I'm sorry.....I'm sorry," she moaned. Even so, no tears fell. She could not cry any longer. She had already prepared herself for this.

She would not hesitate.

"I'll stop Layfon. You strive for the place you want to go."

He returned the Dite to the weapon harness. He had no more to say to her. Derek left the room in order to receive Layfon outside the palace.

He headed out.

Leerin was temporarily rendered immobile as she covered her face . Layfon would become an obstacle. On the road she was to walk, he would become her obstacle. No, if she didn't realize that before, she might not have to agonize over it. She would not have realized it if she had not seen Meishen crying for Layfon. If so, she would be facing the future with Layfon right now. Perhaps he would even hold the Heaven's Blade. He would be in his best condition as a Military Artist holding that blade.

However, reality was not like that because Leerin already understood her own feelings above all else. She also noticed why she thought of Layfon. That was why she didn't wish for him to appear. He had already left Grendan to search for his own path. He lived for it. It was all right even if his road was not to cross her path because she had already noticed her feelings.

That she must not rely on him anymore.

Perhaps she would never be happy if she hadn't noticed it. Once she overcame this difficulty, perhaps, she could live together with Layfon in the future. It was enough that she knew the foundation for that future right now. She must not see him.

"Uu, Uu....."

Her eyes were hot but the debris of that heat source did not show. She had already decided. Besides, she had cried before Saya. No need to cry anymore. She gathered up her sadness and burned it all with the fire of her spirit. A picture surfaced in her mind. A

picture of thorns. Captured by sadness, only this picture was unrelated to her consciousness. Only this picture remained in her mind. The thorns fell one by one. They fell into emptiness, and for some reason, the last piece landed on Derek's head. In the end, they surrounded Derek. The meaning inside this picture... Leerin didn't want to know, but she knew.

I see. So that's it. That's why Layfon.....

"Then....."

She lifted her head. No tears stained her blindfold. She had decided not to cry. She stared at the door that Derek had closed behind him.

"As I thought, it is still not possible, Layfon," she murmured, standing up.

Resolution filled her face.

Bottled letter for you

He held a document on that day. The document that had arrived in his hand later than its delivery time had given him a huge shock. Not that because it arrived late. Under the inconvenience of letter deliverance between cities, it wasn't possible to guarantee timely delivery of anything. Hence, one would be more lenient to this mishap.

He had deliberately printed out the data from the terminal because he could better feel what he was reading on paper rather than on the screen.

"..... But why?" he muttered after a short moment of confusion .

Rather than joy, doubt first surfaced in his mind. The person in the rough photo on the document looked to have grown a lot, but he had lost his sensitivities. He looked like an ordinary boy. It was hard to believe he had once brought him so much impact. But there was no question to the city he came from, and his name was the same as before.

The person in the photo still left traces in his mind. This happened five years ago. The childish air in the boy was disappearing, but some part of it remained. The trace of youth. People always viewed the traces of the young as their potential in the future. Though he shouldn't be considering this as he was only twenty years of age, but the trace of youth could fade with growth.

The choices in one's life reduced through time. In the end, only one road was possible. However, this explanation was for the general populace.

He was different.

As a Military Artist, he was born to fight. He had no other choice, and his talent had farther paved the road for him. For him to come to an Academy City filled with immature students, it was unbelievable.

..... But this was the reality.

"Have to do my best," he murmured.

Karian Loss. This was his name. He was the Student President of the Academy City Zuellni. This was where he was now.

That thing was in every post office near any roaming bus station of any city. In a box beside the counter held letters placed in a mess. Karian tried all he could to take out one of the letters. The roaming bus driver, wearing a somewhat dirty uniform, had stuffed a few

letters into that box and had then taken new packages from the post office and left. Though the letter wasn't eye-catching, it had strongly attracted Karian's attention.

It was a letter without an address for its addressee, a letter not specifically written for anyone or any organization. It was sent to anyone, any city no matter what that city was, as long as it was sent to someone living in a world different from the sender's own. A letter without an address. In Karian's memory, these letters weren't happily received by the post office. However, for some reason, these letters were increasing in number. The post office had also taken a countermeasure against it.

At that time, Karian was only ten years old. He lived in the Trade City Santoburug. Since the beginning of the year, his vision had deteriorated drastically. He had to wear glasses now. The uncomfortable feeling on his ears and nose made him square his glasses.

The letter in his hand was quite new. Except for the rough edges of the four corners, he couldn't find any traces of damage on it. It had probably taken in all the luck of the roaming bus. Karian studied the envelope and put it in his bag. Though there was no rule that said one couldn't take the letter home, he still wanted it to be safe.

What was he expecting? Perhaps expecting a change to his routine life. He wanted to breathe in the outside air.

The present Karian could not recall what he was thinking back at that time. Either way, he remembered he had taken the letter home.

His family life was very content. He lived in a huge mansion. He had a strict and serious father, a gentle mother and a young sister..... No matter how he looked at it, it was a good family. Karian himself did not have anything to be dissatisfied about. Not that he would complain. As the child of a rich family, he worked hard for his grades and people could easily find any shortcomings on the surface. His parents loved him. No one would be more fortunate than him in this world. He was content.

But, for sure.....

"Nii-sama."

The door opened after a knock. Karian's sister walked in with a servant, carrying a heavy book in her arms. Hair the same color as Karian's waved behind her as she delivered the book to him. He had lent her the book a few days ago.

"You've finished reading it?"

"Um," she nodded with a face that carried an immature air.

"Did you pull an all-nighter?"

This thick book wasn't one that a child could finish reading in so short a period of time. He studied her and did not see traces of tiredness in her eyes.

"Lend me the next one," she said without answering him and pushed the book to him. Karian took it with a sour smile and caressed her head. His hand felt the warmth that was unique to a child's, proof of her exhaustion.

"I'll prepare it and lend it to you tomorrow."

"You must."

She pouted at the gentle instruction but she immediately agreed . She was probably losing to sleep. It was extraordinary that she could concentrate and finish reading such a thick book at her age.

The servant took her hand and led her out of the door. Her footsteps were not stable. She would probably fall asleep before she arrived in her room. This was his younger sister, Felli Loss. Out of all normal members of the Loss family, she was a special child with the power of Psychokinesis.

That was Felli.

Kei – was a special power that supported the strength of a Military Artist. A Psychokinesist made a further change with it. A Psychokinesist's body strength was the same as a normal person's, but she possessed strong brain cells that could release the Kei of Psychokinesis, turn it into atoms and use it to gather information and to communicate.

Karian returned the book to the bookshelf, feeling the weight of the book through his wrist. Felli could read and write at the age of

six, and she could read professional books of this thickness, all thanks to her ability of Psychokinesis. Though the words she used were still a child's words, her knowledge far exceeded Karian's.

Incredible. Though Karian had met Military Artists and Psychokinesists, all of them were adults. Were they that incredible too when they were young? Did such a huge distance exist between them and the normal people? Felli had so easily crossed over the four years that separated them. His sadness probably rose from his psychology.

He was jealous of his sister.

At his age, he was beginning to use his knowledge to his advantage. That was what made him sad. The gloomy atmosphere in his room intensified.

He returned to the desk and without any mood to study, leaned on the chair. A sense of failure and inferiority mixed together and created a feeling that he couldn't describe with words. He couldn't think of a way to let it out, yet he didn't want to be troubled about it on his own. Not that he couldn't imagine it. It was just revolting to even think about it.

His hesitation stayed with him and only became worse and worse. The negative feeling stuck to every part of his body like glue. While finding a way to escape it, he found the letter in his bag.

The door to the Student President's room had been blocked. A tray of sandwiches that replaced dinner, prepared by the Student Council members, sat on the table. Karian was sipping tea after dinner.

The person who walked into the room was Felli. She had just entered her first year. The feeling of wearing the General Studies uniform was nostalgic. Perhaps he wasn't used to her growth in these four years since he left her. She was twelve back then. He had only recently gotten used to the difference between the present Felli and the Felli in his memory. Once more, he could only sigh at the speed of the growth of an adolescent.

The emotionless face of a pschokinesist had not changed, but currently, Felli's cheeks were pale red, her breathing irregular. She must have run from her room to here.

"Nii-san."

In her irregular breathing, she had changed her greeting.

".... What is it?"

She held a new uniform in a plastic bag.

"What is the meaning of this?" she looked at him angrily.

He squared his glasses and spread his hands. His face showed the icy expression he used during work.

"As you can see, I'm transferring you to Military Arts."

"Why? I....."

"If possible, I want you to live freer, but the city's current circumstances do not allow it. You should also know of the Academy City's situation."

"What has that got to do with me? I know Zuellni would lose all its selenium mines if it lost in the next Military Arts Competition. But we'll leave this city one day. In that case, why....."

"Felli."

He understood her and he held the same feeling, but he still stopped her.

"That's rude to all the students who come here to search their path."

"Then I just need to go to another Academy City....."

"Do you think our parents would consent to that?"

Felli lowered her head, biting her lips. Everyone back in Santoburug had high expectation of her as a genius in Psychokinesis. Originally, she had no choice but to live in her home city for her entire life. However, influenced by their daughter's thinking, the parents had allowed Felli to leave the city

for a limited time. The condition was that she must go to Zuellni, where her brother Karian was. The Loss family was rich through its information trading, and it had used its huge influence to persuade the government to allow Felli to leave. On the surface, Felli had appeared to leave for Zuellni to further her studies. The department of a Psychokinesist like Felli was that important a thing for the city.

"..... I didn't want to be a Psychokinesist."

"I also didn't want to be a normal person. If I had a power equal to yours, I wouldn't have done this. Since people cannot just obtain what the power they want, unfairness also clings to you all the time."

Though it was an opinion hard to accept, Felli's head was lowered and she did not argue. She just kept her head down, not moving an inch.

"From tomorrow, you're a Military Arts student. Your classes are the same; no changes would interfere with your lessons. I'll let you know later of other procedures."

The room echoed his dry voice. His sister staggered out of the room. Alone in the room, Karian leaned back on the chair. His body felt heavy, as if he was feeling all his exhaustion at once. He recalled her figure leaving the room with her head lowered. It was a nostalgic feeling, proof of the fact that the many years of separation between them had not changed them.

Perhaps it was the same for Felli.

Karian opened the envelope. The letter, having traveled a long journey, had obtained different kinds of smell. It also retained a faint aroma of the flowers, a smell of the outside. The smell of a place that Karian could not contact with. The air of some place that disallowed him from stepping foot in. The letter had allowed him to temporarily overlap with a different place. He seemed to understand why this kind of letter was always mailed out.

The words on the letter weren't typed up. They were hand-written in neat handwriting, as if the writer was imitating some kind of writing. It looked to have come from a female's hand. Karian tossed away his worries and began to read.

"Hello, stranger. My name is Sharon Marcel. I really hope this letter won't be sent back to my home city. I wonder what will happen to it?"

What will happen to it? That troubled Karian. Sharon Marcel had not mentioned the name of her city, but from the content of the letter, she must have left the city already. Karian found that amazing. Though he knew many people could change from one roaming bus to another, it did not feel that real to him as his level

of knowledge was still not enough. He wanted to know why she left her home city, but he'd probably only find out after he read the entire letter. He kept reading.

"Perhaps it's strange for me to send a letter like this after leaving a city, but it wouldn't be surprising if you think about it closely. I only know the sceneries of two cities. Though the roaming bus has stopped in many cities, I could only look in from the outside. No matter which city it is, I can't move freely as I'm not a citizen of that city. I understand from the journey that there are so many more people and cities than I can imagine. Back in my home city, what I heard was just a small part of everything. This world is really vast! But as for cities that are related to my life, there are only two."

She publicly announced her wish in this letter, saying that she wanted to understand the world more. It wasn't just for knowledge. She wanted to have experienced it and write down the wish of the world where numerous Regios drifted.

And she also understood that it was an impossible wish.

"What the....."

Karian was disappointed. He never expected it was such a boring letter. Though one could only write about oneself in a letter not addressed to anyone, but how could she hope to gain the goodwill of the reader by writing a negative letter? This person seemed to be older than Karian. This side of her was worse than him.

Karian was angry that the letter had failed his expectation. Of course, one reason was that he held too much expectation. Normally, he'd just laugh it off, but not today.

Yes, he should write back. This sudden thought fascinated him. The other person was female. She probably wrote the letter, hoping to meet somebody. In that case, the person who received the letter must be a brilliant male. A male who could understand her, respect her and comfort her. Yes, that's right. Karian pondered in his foul interest, pondering how to reply as his pen ran on the white page. He knew this was boring and meaningless and was tempted to stop writing. But he wrote to the end and folded the letter, wrote the address on the envelope and took it to the post office. He did all that without hesitation.

When he put the letter in the mailbox, all he had was a feeling of self-hatred. He hated he was only a ten year old kid. Perhaps he could manage to suppress his impulse when he grew older?

"That's why I'm sending you this letter, to you whom I know nothing but your name. If possible, I hope you live in a city that I know nothing about. But in a world that contains numerous cities like stars, I think it won't be that bad for the letter to be sent back to my home city.

I want to listen to your story. I also want to hear the story of your city."

Trade city Santoburug. A city that specialized in information trading. Its system was the same as a normal city's. Every few years, it participated in an intercity match. Mostly, it fought

against the cities in its vicinity – Ronderia and Karamarina. One was a manufacturing city. The other was an agricultural city. Don't know whose joke it was to fight against these two good business partners. Since Santoburug's relationship with these two cities had worsened, it could only obtain information from faraway cities. And the information was what Ronderia and Karamarina desired. In the end, the hostile relationship between the three cities evolved into that of a natural information trade.

An Academy City was the best target in terms of information trade. It gathered immature people, but that meant it had also stored up talents from different cities. It was a city of mixed values. The city chased after flexibility. It was able to use its potential on research and invention. An Academy City's research was valued highly by others. Other cities all used the result of these researches to make other inventions and employ them in use.

According to Sharon's request, Karian had explained the situation of his own city. But when he thought closely, he didn't think there was anything special he wanted to let off.

The outside world. It must have all kinds of things that differed from here. Each sealed off city had its own culture, but the specialty of Santoburug had averaged out the difference between culture and civilization. The trade of information seemed to have smoothed out all the ripples in the sand.

In so prosperous a city like Santoburug that was the average of all cities, didn't that mean it doesn't have anything sellable and unique? As Karian had thought, it mattered not where one was.

Time passed in such thoughts. As he waited for a response, anticipation and uneasiness greeted him every morning. But because the time of delivery between cities was much longer than he had imagined, he had gradually forgotten it.

It was after three months that he received the letter.

Karian examined all the documents sent over, and began processing the letter of notification.

If they had such a strong Military Artist as him, they would win the next Military Arts Competition. Everyone would hold the same conclusion in the face of this person's strength. But an excellent Psychokinesist was necessary to allow this Military Artist to utilize his full potential. If information could be provided to this Military Artist in a large scale, his strength could be used more easily. As such, Felli was necessary.

"But....."

Karian looked at the document in his hand again. This person had chosen to enroll in General Studies. In reality, a Military Artist

of his level could learn nothing by entering the Military Arts course. Felli was probably the same. The government shouldn't have given this person permission to leave his city.

Something must have happened.

Karian must find out the reason to it. He had to transfer this person to Military Arts when he entered the Academy City, because the year of his entry was the year in which the Military Arts Competition was to be held. Karian's gaze landed on the vase in the room as he thought of how to obtain that information. The red flowers blossomed happily in front of him.

"..... Am I going overboard?" he asked the flowers.

But the aroma drifting through the air was different from that in his memory.

Karian was skeptical of the letter that the manager of the house had taken to him. Once he saw the name of the sender, he recalled what he did three months ago. Extreme self-hatred and embarrassment made him want to tear apart the unopened letter, but he wanted to find out what she had to say. In the end, he chose to open the letter.

"Yo, hello. Thanks for your reply. In truth, I've sent out ten similar letters. You're the third to reply..... And no one had written as badly as you."

As if he had received a head wound, the impact was heavy for him.

"You understood my intention and my feelings, but you still played with me like I'm an idiot. You deliberately messed around with me, who is so far from you. It's rare for such long distance communication."

A chill ran up Karian's back. Large beads of sweat ran down his face. He had been seen through. This woman had seen through his horrible taste by just reading the letter. He felt deeply the wound made by the hidden crawls of this person whom he held in contempt. Though this atmosphere made him feel dizzy, he kept on reading.

"But I like you the most of the three. You described your city in details, but unfortunately, I can't give you a pass. Though I want to understand a city's history and uniqueness, that's not only it. There's also the scenery. You might only think the city is only used to gather information, but that's not it. I want to understand how you feel about the city. Perhaps you don't understand with such an abstract explanation. Ah yes. You said in the letter you're 22. But in truth, how old are you? If you still want to say more, then send me a letter. I hope you'd say something more meaningful next time."

He had lost completely.....

After reading the letter, Karian looked at the ceiling. He never thought the prank he played back then would suffer such defeat.

"How can this happen?"

He was still doubtful after reading. Was that address not the sender's address? Was this woman actually in Santaburug, someone that Karian knew? Who was she? Karian had no clues. His parents..... But his dad was busy all day, and her mother was busy helping her husband. They wouldn't have the time.

This person might not be in Santoburug. In that case.....

"Did she really leave her city?"

His sense of defeat did not fade, but he couldn't suppress his curiosity. He quickly found a piece of blank paper and began moving the pen without hesitation. Say something. What should he say?

Karian never thought he could be so happy in his confusion.

The person who came in after knocking at the door was a young Military Artist with a stiff expression on her face. Vance, standing beside Karian, looked at the gloomy girl.

"Excuse me. I'm in Military Arts second year, Nina Antalk. I heard you want to talk to me?"

"Yes, I've been looking for you," Karian nodded and looked at the document beside his hand. An application form to create a platoon.

"You want to form the 17th platoon?"

"Yes."

"According to the document, you don't have enough members. You can't form a platoon just with a piece of paper."

Karian's words did not scare her. Keeping her stiff expression, she nodded.

"As you said, there's only me and Sharnid Elipton. There's also a Dite technician from the Alchemy course, but Sharnid was once active in the 10th platoon."

"You entered the 14th platoon in your first year. Sharnid was the same. He's young and can do much. If there are enough members, I'd really anticipate the forming of this platoon."

"Karian," Vance cut in a low voice. He meant to stop Nina from forming a team. Nina and Sharnid were both excellent Military Artists, but Vance had doubt on whether Nina had the quality to act as captain. Nina was in her second year. The first priority they should consider was her experience.

Vance was right.

"..... I want to know why you want to form a platoon? What are you not satisfied with in the 14th platoon?"

"Nothing. I think the 14th platoon is excellent."

"Then.....?"

"I admit it's my willfulness. But I want to try a fighting style that can reflect myself."

"You can't do that in the 14th platoon?"

"The 14th platoon is excellent, but time is needed to do things my way. I'm doubtful of whether Zuellni has the time for that now ."

"What honest opinion."

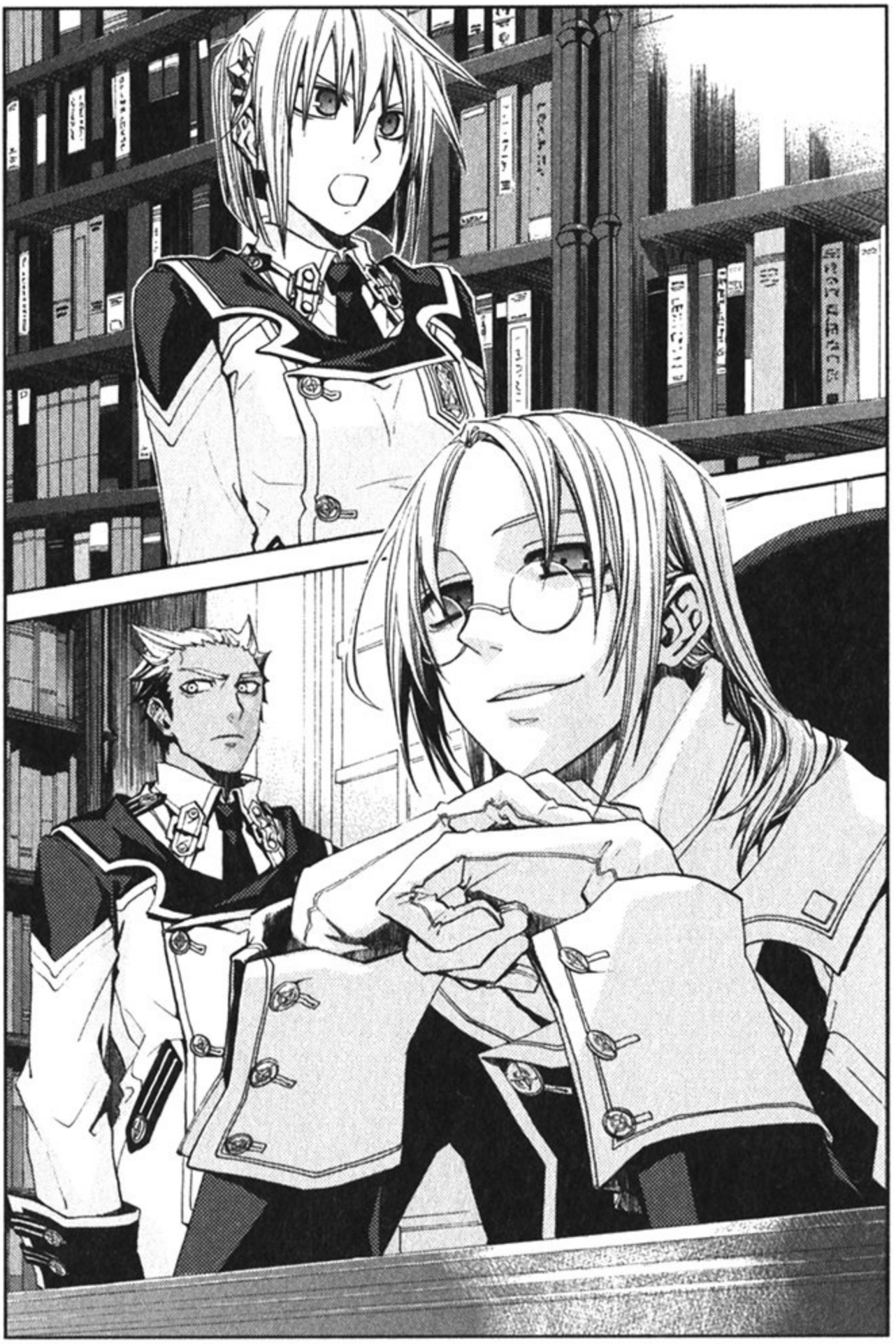
Nina's personality dazzled Karian. So honest that she was stupid. This was shown in her handing in the application form even without enough members. It was easy to reject her with the

reason of her being young and impatient. Though Nina needed Karian's permission to form a platoon, Vance's vote could reject her in this situation.

But he did not. This meant Vance was also moved by Nina's honesty.

"I understand your passion," Karian said. His words cleared up Nina's confusion. However, Vance's muttering made her control her emotions.

"But it's not possible to properly acknowledge the team when you don't have enough members. Besides, it's not permissible to find any Military Artists to fill the number. If one can easily become a platoon member, it would affect the air of Military Artists."



"..... Yes."

Nina's relaxed expression turned stiff again. She was alert for the bitterness to come.

"How about this. I'll give you temporary permission. If you don't have enough members by the deadline, then I'll take back the permission. As for the limit..... yes, let's make it the month after the opening ceremony. Both you and Sharnid are excellent Military Artists. Even though the 17th platoon might not be formed in the end, I don't want you two to have nothing to do. Besides, it takes about the same time to enter another platoon."

"That won't happen."

"I hope so."

Nina's gaze pressed onto Karian's in response to the provocation in his words. A chill ran up Karian's back at the Military Artist's hostility, but his expression remained the same. Bad Military Artists would be exiled from an Academy City, but he knew Nina wasn't that kind of person.

"I very much anticipate your performance, oh yes....."

Pretending he had suddenly thought of it, Karian said the things he already had in mind.

"I have someone to introduce to you."

"Huh?"

"A Psychokinesist. And I'm not boasting. She really is talented."

Nina's eyes shone. For among Military Artists, those who held special powers to evolve into Psychokinesists were few. In addition, this was a talented Psychokinesist. This was what Nina needed.

"Please introduce her to me," Nina said with her head lowered.

Karian's smile was faint. He had planned this from the beginning. Since hearing of Nina from Vance, Nina was enough to make him interested in her. And her stubbornness far exceeded Karian's prediction. What was more important was that this level was not enough to form a new platoon. On retrospect, this environment suited that person. He might not be able to make use of his potential in an old platoon. On the other hand, the new stage that awaited his coming and the adaptability to him were worth anticipating. No. Even if others were to match his strength, Felli was enough for that. Even if the team was to disband afterwards, the hurt caused by it could be alleviated.

"What are you thinking?"

Vance's gloomy face watched Nina leave the Student President's room with elation.

"I got beaten by her passion."

Karian didn't know whether Vance understood his meanings. All he thought of was next year, the time of *his* arrival. Besides, it hadn't been confirmed whether *he* was to arrive at Zuellni.

After Karian received that letter, he had communicated with her three times. One time, the letter took three months to arrive. The other two letters took one month and two weeks respectively. This probably was due to the number of roaming buses and their different routes. But the difference was comical. Though the route wasn't that different subjectively speaking, but on closer inspection , all cities were constantly on the move. Even though one didn't know how long a distance existed between two cities, the route must be continuously changing.

Perhaps, the vast world was in fact very small. The movements of the cities and the wilderness conquered by filth monsters made people feel the distance was long.

Karian received the fourth letter after six months. He was now eleven years old. This was his first time understanding the meaning behind his age increase. A few more years, he'd be of age to request to leave the city. Fortunately, the Loss family specialized in information trade. Though father had already settled down in Santoburug and had his own employees, information had it that he used to travel between cities before his marriage. He would probably agree with Karian's thinking. Once he graduated from junior high.....

But there was one thing he was concerned about. No, one thing that he regretted.

"Your mind really does not match your age. You're not cute at all. But you're right. A safe route changes according to the changes of a city's location. Normally, even cities near each other spend a lot of time moving, so much more than that moving in a straight line. I heard of this from friends who live in the Traffic City. Speaking of which, aren't all roaming buses, as the key of communication between cities, under the control of the Electronic Fairy in Joeldem. It might be a bit ominous, but what would happen if filth monsters destroyed Joeldem?

Normally, I'd have to wait for a long time to hear your thoughts , so this time, allow me to share my opinion. Uh, though I don't know how Electronic Fairies came to this world, they have formed different characteristics of the cities, creating the survival system for us humans. If the city's consciousness is defined as a body, then we're acknowledging them as living beings like us. Does that mean instead of Electronic Fairies living as individuals, they are social beings who each work different parts?"

That was the Sharon Karian couldn't see. She was in Academy City . Even if Karian went over to her city, she would've graduated when he enrolled.

Karian had only recently noticed the simple thing mentioned in the letter. As he read the letter, his admiration for Sharon's theory grew. He was both surprised and afraid of the truth.

"Did I leave the city to see her?"

The roaming bus and this letter caused his knowledge of the distance between cities to fade. Though it wasn't impossible, there did exist a faint sense of distance and danger. Most important was, she had never mentioned her home city, nor did she mention her plan after graduation.

Should he ask? Would she tell him after he asked? What would happen after he asked? Would he follow her and go to her home city? And afterward? In fact, Karian already knew how to express his wish to leave. He just hadn't prepared himself mentally. That wish had only stayed on the level of knowledge. But the knowledge he obtained from early maturity and his own thinking had made him comprehend the growth of a young man. Like the etching of a mark, this was his first time seeing the other as a female. He hadn't yet seen her, but he was attracted by the personality and knowledge brought out by the words. Thinking how this was just like his style, he began mocking himself to calm down.

But true peace and calmness did not come to him.

Yet, he could not ask her face to face.

The possibility of Karian and Sharon meeting randomly in so many cities was zero. Even if Karian was to inherit his father's information trade and traveled between cities like his father in his youth, he could only raise that possibility by very little. Was his feeling for her to end when he hadn't even seen her? This thinking and his bitterness made his hands shake.

He couldn't end it like that. He had decided. Nothing would happen if he waited. Waiting for her to come to Santoburug was the same as waiting for a miracle. He must act. Of course, he wasn't planning anything exaggerated. Immediately leaving for the Academy City she was in was not realistic. It would be strange for a kid of his age to handle the administrative papers for a roaming bus ride. At this stage, it was possible for him to see her. Besides, what could a child do once he saw her? Nothing was advantageous for him.

He could only do one thing. Though it was an insignificant action, Karian knew he must resist falling into the sprouting of this confused feeling. He held his pen, as if he was resisting the resistance in himself.

Everywhere else was dark. No matter how dazzling sunlight bathed the ground, the ground had no connection to the world beneath it. It was as if darkness had filled a ditch. Karian grasped his own collar.

"How's it?"

"The usual failure to attack the fake nervous system. The simple reaction really isn't satisfactory."

If he could let things go by not looking at the exhausted face of the Head of Alchemy, it would have been good. Faint light floated before the two of them. The darkness was most dense around the light, as if it was sucked into that light only to be pushed aside.

"I've always been thinking, do you want it to wake?"

"It was originally born from the Guardian Beast plan. It separated from what cannot be analyzed. Through a long period of time, changes had occurred to it. And we can no longer understand the original body it came from."

Karian could tell the passion in his words. The Head of Alchemy was no longer answering the question. He couldn't see his expression in the dark. Of course, not that he wanted to see his face, fascinated as if possessed by a devil. Beneath the sunlight, the Head of Alchemy was a proper researcher, but he had changed since entering here. Was this his true nature? Or did the darkness turn him into another him?

"No one knows what would happen if it wakes."

"No one knows how much power it has, but it must be enormous. If it can be gathered and processed, it could solve the current problem."

"That's just an optimistic speculation."

That wasn't it. Karian hadn't been listening since the middle of the conversation. This man was like the sinking darkness, possessed by that existence. The city's crisis had just given him one more excuse.

The scenery hidden within Zuellni. Only after becoming the Student President could he see this scenery. It was the greatness brought about by a certain reason, or it was just randomness. No matter what, Karian couldn't have seen this in Santoburug.

At the same time, it reminded him of something worrying.

(Is this what you've seen?)

Sharon. For you, who have once lived here, you should have seen this too.

He returned to his room. Only the icy cold air greeted him. His sister was in her own room. He hadn't seen her for days. That couldn't be helped, but he was worried. He had wanted to acknowledge the way of life she wanted. In fact, before he knew she was to enroll, he had thought he would let her live the way she wanted if Zuellni were to lose in the next Military Arts Competition.

He had given up until that time came.

A miracle had happened. No, it was about to happen. If a miracle appeared, anyone would naturally consider how to make it more effective, even if he was to sacrifice his sister..... It didn't matter that she would hate him after that.

It was deep into the night. Karian changed into his pajamas and walked carefully to the kitchen. He made himself a cup of tea and returned to the living room.

Karian tasted the tea under a lamp. In the dim room, only the aroma drifting from the table stimulated his feeling. Smell. First, he only smelled the aroma that was left on the letter. The aroma of another city. Attracted by that aroma, he had decided to come to Zuellni.

Because Sharon was here at that time.

Karian's gaze moved to the door at the sound. Felli appeared under the dim light. Though he couldn't read her expression, the atmosphere surrounding her was rejecting him. She walked past the sofa behind him and headed for the kitchen. He could hear the sound of water running from the tap. Felli came back out. It seemed she only came to get some water.

"Felli," he called.

"..... What?"

"After the end of next year's Military Arts Competition, I'd let you live the way you like. No matter what, I'll be graduating then. No one can bind you anymore."

"..... Do you think it'll go that smoothly?"

Felli wasn't at all happy with his words. She was smart. But unlike Karian, Felli's cleverness came from the experiences as a Psychokinesist.

"Do you think people who know of my Psychokinesis would let me switch back to General Studies? Even though you're returning to the city, the next Student President might process my transfer. The promise of someone who is about to leave is meaningless."

He couldn't defend. If he admitted her point, he would only anger her more.

"I can only....." She didn't say anymore. Her words disappeared in the dim darkness. She could only not do her best. That was probably the content of her missing words.

"Why do you want to protect this city so badly?"

She didn't wait for his answer as she closed the door and left.

"..... It's harder to persuade one person than a crowd."

He had been in Zuellni for five years now. Though he had learned how to operate a city in the Student Council that Sharon was once in, his way of interacting with individuals had not changed.

Karian sighed and quickly drained the tea that had gone cold.

"Why.....?"

He returned to his bed and caught a glance of the vase sitting by the window. The flowers seemed to understand him as they wilted in the dark.

He would put the flowers somewhere else tomorrow.

This thought accompanied him as he sank into sleep.

He had written the letter. Though he didn't know whether it worked, the uneasiness of waiting for the reply and the regret of wondering whether the content was appropriate were speedily destroying the feelings he had laid bare in the letter.

Every day was long. The heavy pressure pressing on his chest failed to leave him with the passing of time. The first month seemed to have stolen his consciousness. The second month was like forever. But time continued to pass day by day. At last, he received the letter at the end of the third month.

"In truth, I'm surprised. You do know what you're saying? I'm sorry, but I thought you were joking. It's unbelievable that you feel like this when we're so far away. But my dream is very solid. Ahah , I really am a girl.

Of course, I'm happy, since I'm a girl. Can you understand that delicate difference?

But, sorry. I can't return your feelings. This isn't a problem of age and distance. I already have someone I like. I'm helpless with him. He's the same age as me but he's playful. Yet, sometimes, he

can be serious. What a strange guy. True to say, with my serious personality, I don't think I'm suited with that type of person. But this can't be helped. Maybe, this feeling would not be realized. Even so, that can't be helped. This explanation is spoiled, but I think you'd understand. Even if I could tidy up my feelings, you cannot come to my city. I can't return to Santoburug. I have my own reasons."

The letter hadn't ended, but he could no longer read the rest of the letter that he had been waiting for, for so long.

The conclusion was out. As Sharon said, this wasn't possible. Even so, he couldn't help himself and had written her the letter, pouring all his emotions out in it. He didn't cry. Only his throat felt bad.

Had it ended?

The second day, Karian bought flowers with the spare time he had from his work at the Student Council. Not only did the flowers at home wilt, the flowers in the Student President's room had lost their vitality. In order to buy new flowers, he had come to walk on the road of the shopping street.

A girl had appeared in a corner of an alley that did not connect to the shopping street, holding a bunch of flowers. Judging from the apron she wore, she must be working in some restaurant. The flowers were probably decoration for the shop.

After seeing Karian, the girl was slightly surprised. She nodded an apology and was about to leave. Karian smiled as he walked past her.

The aroma of flowers drifted to his nostrils.

"..... Can you wait a second?" he quickly turned around and called to her. He stood before the nervous girl and looked at the flowers before her chest.

A bunch of small flowers in faint yellow.

He had never seen this type. He had come to many florists in Zuellni, but he had never seen this flower. No, he had never smelled this aroma.

"Excuse me..... Where did you buy these flowers?"

The girl answered in suspicion. After thanking her, he walked straight into the alley. The alley was very narrow and it branched off. He kept walking between the two buildings. The end was a space that seemed to draw a perfect square. Tall buildings filled the four corners. A random space had appeared here. Who knew whether it was planned? In the space was a greenhouse. It looked like a simple house made to store equipment. It probably hadn't been repaired. Karian could see it was originally a fine house.

Though the plastic sheets covering the greenhouse weren't that transparent, he could barely see a figure moving in the house. The closer he walked, the stronger the smell of the flowers.

"Excuse me," he said. The person in the greenhouse answered him. It was a female's voice.

"As I thought, it was lonely to end this relationship with you. Though I was lonely, that can't be helped. I still think of you. I know I'm willful. A relationship on paper feels somewhat special. It's simple, but the other person cannot accept it. Because you must be very serious.

But how long can this feeling last? Forever? Can't be. I'm sorry. To me, swearing for a love that has no result is just a lie. Because that's the same as ignoring other means of obtaining happiness. That would become someone else's unhappiness. Only you? If that's the case, those words reflect you. But can I just sit and watch unhappiness befall you? Perhaps you would say yes. But I don't want you to be unhappy because of me. I wish for you to end this feeling for me. I don't want you to be unhappy. I don't want any students to be unhappy in the Academy City. At the same time, I don't want you to be unhappy.

You knew of this city because of me. You're my most important person who hadn't changed in those six years. You're closely connected to the Academy City that I deeply love.

I've decided not to write to you anymore. I'd welcome your letters if you were to write back. I think when that time comes; you'd have begun tidying your emotions.

If possible, I really want you to see that little space I made. For you who can't appreciate scenery, I wonder what expression you'd make after seeing it. How anticipating.

If you really did come to Zuellni, then try to find it. If you're lucky, perhaps you'd stay there."

The door to the greenhouse opened. The rich aroma inside it enveloped Karian.

It was here.

That must be it.

Sharon's letters always carried the aroma of another city. The aroma came from these flowers.

"Is there anything you want?"

The female student wiped the sweat on her forehead as she looked at him. She was suspicious of the Student President coming here alone.

"Aa, sorry. Could you sell me some flowers?"

"Ah, I'm sorry. These flowers aren't for sale. The conditions to nurture them are very harsh, so not many flowers are grown. Sometimes when they're ready, I give them out to people I know."

"This is?"

"The outside base of the Flower Appreciation Research Club."

"Outside base?"

Karian looked around.

"Been negotiated?"

"Yes. The conditions here are suited to growing these flowers. The senpais in the past negotiated and built this greenhouse."

"In the past. How long ago?"

"I heard it was ten years ago."

"I see."

It really is here.

"Can I look around?"

She gave him permission and he entered the greenhouse. Cute little yellow flowers spread in the house. Though they were small, the aroma they gave off was rich. Not rich in a way that made him feel uncomfortable. He felt refreshed.

So it's here. It's the scenery that Sharon wants me to see. The place she had put lots of effort into creating is this place. Flowers are blossoming in between buildings, in a place that had disappeared amidst data. This must be the scenery she had mentioned.

Ghost in Ghost

ゴースト・イン・ゴースト

She ran desperately. All that was left in her mind was her resolve. Nothing else mattered.

It was dark everywhere and monsters were closing in. The multi-eye held no emotions. Teeth like scythes sat in rows inside the opened jaw. Just imagining being bitten into pieces was enough to make her tremble.

She began to doubt her current location. She was in a place she didn't want to be in and had run into an unexpected monster. What joke was this?

Why do I have to fight?

Felli Loss was just a Psychokinesist, so why.....

That day began with the usual morning. Having arrived at the school for some time, she passed the time as usual. Felli Loss didn't have any friends, yet she did not feel lonely amidst a crowd. Not that she didn't want to make friends, not that she felt painful interacting with others.

She just felt it was all right to be alone.

Her classmates knew she didn't deliberately create a barrier to wall them off. She would respond if they walked over to talk to her . They would also make jokes with her. Everyone knew she just didn't wish for others to make lots of effort to talk to her, so few came to speak with her.

"Felli-san."

Hence, her words were slightly odd when she was greeted with such a kind attitude.

It was after the first lesson after lunch break. She was called short when she prepared to leave the room. Felli lifted her head and saw Eri standing before her. She hadn't talked much with Eri. Not that they had a bad relationship. Eri also didn't talk much.

..... But she liked to talk to herself.

"Hohoho..... Shall we go together?"

"Ha....."

They had the same destination. Felli cocked her head as she calculated the intention behind Eri's stiff smile.

"Why?"

Though she didn't know Eri's intention, she was sure she had some sort of purpose.

"Why!..... Hoho, how do you know? Hoho."

"Do you know your laughter is creepy?"

"Hohoho, that can't be helped. It's become a habit. My friends said I'm gloomy, so it's best to at least laugh. This started back then ."

Her friends must have said something regretful.

"What's it?"

"Uh, actually, I've joined a club. We have an activity tonight. If possible, Felli-san, can you join us?"

"..... What does the club do?"

"A club for horror lovers."

"I refuse."

Ignoring the still gloomily smiling Eri, Felli quickly walked away.

"Ah! Please wait."

Eri ran to catch up with her.

"Please don't say such cold thing~"

"You must be holding that activity in the ruins?"

"Yes, because we're going for supernatural excursion."

"No negotiation."

"Ahah!"

She increased her speed and chased after Felli.

"Don't say that.... The president said to bring some friends. The president's order is absolute."

"I'm not interested in your situation."

"Please don't say that. I..... I only have you as a friend outside the club."

"Then please take my name off your friend list for today."

"So cold!"

Eri cried. Though the students around them looked concerned, they all left due to Eri's icy and gloomy smile. Felli sympathized with her..... but as the party involved, she felt embarrassed about it and so she halted her steps.

But she immediately regretted her action.

A challenging smile adorned Eri's face.

"Hohohohoo..... Could you be afraid of ghosts, Felli-san?"

"Why would I? I just don't believe in things that can't be analyzed rationally."

Correctly speaking, she meant things that flakes of Psychokinesis couldn't analyze.

"If I'm confused by information that can't be felt, I cannot accurately send out information."

"Hohoho..... Even though you're saying this, you're really scared."

"No, as I was saying..."

"No matter. Even though you're a Military Artist, it's understandable if there are a few things you're afraid of."

"....."

It seems she was provoking her dignity to make her join. This must be Eri's strategy? Or it could be the president's. Either way, none of it worked on Felli. Not even Eri's strategy worked.

"Hohoho....."

"Just say whatever you like."

"Aaa, please wait."

Her pretense collapsed.

"Don't do what you cannot do," Felli said.

"Um, uh..... I'm sorry," Eri continued to explain, lying on the floor as if she was paralyzed. "But new members must invite

friends to participate. If I can't do that, I'd have to play a punishment game. Do you find that too much?"

"Exactly."

"Uh, please, I beg you. Save me."

She looked really pitiful. Felli sighed and nodded.

It was night. After training at the war field, Felli changed her clothes and headed out for the meeting.

"Ah, Felli-san," Eri waved at her. It seemed she was worried she might not show. Felli felt it must have been really horrible for her when she rejected her plea.

"Is it here?"

They were next to the building of the Student Council. Before Felli was an old building. She couldn't tell whether the paint protecting its surface was peeling off or just barely hanging on. Dirt filled the windows. Some windows were broken. No one was in the area. She felt uneasy by coming to an empty building, and that uneasiness was intensified since the building had been abandoned for a long time.

They were in the middle of Zuellni. This abandoned building next to the building of the Student Council was creepy, the atmosphere magnified a thousand times. Though Felli had visited the building of the Student Council many times, this was her first

time seeing this building. But that couldn't be helped as the building was surrounded by thick bushes. It gave off a feeling of rejection. Even the only road that led to the depth of the bush that Felli now walked on was overgrown with wild grasses, repelling outsiders.

Around ten people had already arrived.

As expected, the Horror lovers club didn't have many members. She understood the president's intention now, but according to Eri, the club had over a hundred members. Besides, Eri had only entered a branch of it. If all members gathered together, there should be over one thousand of them.

"....."

"Hohoho. Thought that's the case, only these people are seriously interested in attending the activities," Eri told the truth while Felli stood speechless.

It was useless to get numb over this now.

The club's irregularly published magazine was popular and the money had provided them with minimal financial support. Sometimes, they had enough to organize a big event.

Eri kept talking about past big events..... She was probably lured by the same tactic.

The announcement sounded. It came from a girl with freckles around her nose. For some reason, she gave off a mysterious aura. She must be the president.

"Well then – let's begin," she said after looking at the twenty or so participants. She hadn't confirmed whether anyone was late. So unorganized.

"First, I'll explain since we've some newcomers. Then please come forward, our special guest."

"Hey, hey, you aren't even gonna introduce him?"

The special guest smiled sourly and walked out of the crowd. His gaze was on the building. Perhaps he was suppressing his presence so no one noticed him. Had he used Sakkei? That meant... .....

A tall and muscular man stood out beside the president. The more Felli looked at him, the bigger her suspicion grew.

"I'm the special guest, Vance Harudei. "

Embarrassment showed on his face.

Felli was shocked, her eyes wide. This tall Head of Military Arts who always accompanied her brother the Student President gave off the image of someone angry and impatient. She never thought he'd show himself in such a shadowy club. No, from the way he spoke, it felt like he had joined one of the primary clubs. She couldn't imagine what the primary clubs were like these days.

However, Vance was really before her. This was the truth. For someone who didn't show much emotion like Vance to suddenly reveal a side full of humanity, Felli found this fact both shocking and revolting.

Not at all concerned with the strange gazes pinning him, Vance began the explanation.

"This building used to be for experiment purposes for the Alchemy course. It was the original building for the Alchemy course and has a history of about 30 years."

30 years. This building had not been refurbished for other purposes since Felli entered the Academy City. She couldn't think of why the building had been abandoned for so long.

"This building is not in use because of one of the experiments. The records for that experiment doesn't exist anymore, so it must have been a big event. You'd understand once you enter. But since there are signs indicating the building is in risk of collapsing, please be cautious and don't get close to any dangerous areas," he gave the typical warning to the students and continued, "The event had not only damaged the building but it had also injured and killed several students. Because of that, the Student President of that time decided to abandon this building and built another building for the Alchemy course. The final decision was to demolish the old building but various things happened during the demolition process, ranging from the failing of a crane to workers getting injured. In the end, people who walked past the building had reported seeing students who weren't here anymore. Rumor had it that a ghost interference had occurred."

(How stupid.)

They all sounded like lies to Felli. Just what exactly was a ghost ? It never had a clear definition. Legend had it that a soul existed in a human body. Supernatural lovers typically defined a soul as a ghost. But what happened to a soul that had died? In the time of religion, of a God that believers were devoted to before the existence of Regios, souls were believed to return to where the God resided. Would the God accept the souls of present humans who no longer believed in them? Had the thinking of believing in a God overcome the narrow-mindedness of humans? If a God would unconditionally accept the souls of non-believers, doesn't that mean there shouldn't be any more ghosts in the world? There was also another belief that the souls of stubborn people would remain after they died. This meant the countless people who lived in this world, or those who had a stubborn will were not all buried in this earth? Either way, all weird rumors said ghosts only appeared in special places that ghosts appeared in.

Felli listened to Vance with disappointment.

"Hohoho.... So interesting."

But Eri was enjoying it.

"Aaa..... Those people died in the explosion without realizing they had died. What were their feelings as they appeared here?"

"Have you not thought of failure?" Felli said to Eri, who was convinced she would meet a ghost.

Felli and Eri were given a map and a torch. The members formed into teams of two and they entered the old building in order. Inside, the building smelled humid, stale and dusty. Though there wasn't a trace of any burnt smell, they could see the black stains left by the fire.

"Wuhohoho..... I'm excited," Eri said to the dissatisfied Felli. She slowed down her steps, the light from the torch drifting.

Felli silently stared at the map. It wasn't complete. The danger zones were clearly marked but other areas had been neglected. This was probably done to make the participants search for their own paths. The so called investigation of the strange was just a courage testing game. The president looked like she was used to this. She must have participated many times. Felli couldn't understand how they could be so happy in this dark and dirty place, especially Eri.

"Hohohohohohohohohohoho....."

Eri kept laughing. "Are you scared, Felli-san?"

"How can you be so happy?"

Eri's expression showed she didn't comprehend Felli's question. "Because it's a ghost."

"..... That isn't an answer."

"Why? They appear in a way unknown to us living beings. They chase after us and attempt to possess our bodies, thinking of cursing us to death and bring us over to that side of the world. Isn't that the delicate existence of a ghost?"

"Don't you think this is rude to the dead?"

Even though she said that, it was useless against Eri.

(Hurry up and finish this.)

The only way to finish as quickly as possible was to walk through the building as fast as possible. Felli increased her speed.

"Ah, wait for me."

Eri chased after her in a fluster.

Humid wind blew in past a broken window. Dried leaves and sand blown in by the wind filled the corridor. Every step generated soft crunching sounds. Many of the doors leading to what looked like research labs were opened. As all documents had been moved away, almost all bookshelves stood empty. Abandoned glass containers had stains of yellow in them. Some liquid could have been left in them for a long time. Looking from the color, some horrible things might happen if one were to take out the cork.

"Hohoho, so interesting."

Felli ignored her and silently filled in the map. They needed to investigate all areas in the five story high building except the collapsed areas and an individual area that had been blocked.

"..... This is the last room."

Having investigated the last room, Felli confirmed the map had been filled. They had checked all areas they could enter.

"Ok, let's head back."

"Still haven't met one."

She ignored the disappointed Eri and returned to the corridor. Through the dust covering the window, she could see the sharp tower of the Student Council building. The tower had been turned into a clock tower. Only elite Military Artists with internal Kei could see the time on the clock from the outskirt of the city. As for the building itself, everyone could see it since it was so enormous.

The clock she saw from here was like a giant spying at them. Felli could see the trembling of the moving long hand of the clock. She had looked at the clock before entering the forest that surrounded the old building. They had been in here for two hours now.

"So long."

"Hohoho, is it already that late?" Eri was shocked.

"I spent so much time on this meaningless task."

"Such a regret. Let's return. The president and the others have probably gone back."

Her words made Felli pause.

"What is it?"

"Speaking of which, we haven't seen anyone since entering the building."

"Yes."

Only three entrances were usable in this building. Ten teams were formed from twenty people. Two people for each team and they were to enter through the three entrances. Two teams should have entered before Felli's team.

Felli looked at the map. They had gone through all the possible areas from the entrance. They had also checked the collapsed areas and the blocked off area. They had walked through every corner of the building but why had they not met the first two teams?

"Because this building is huge."

She didn't agree with her.

"Saying it's huge cannot explain the problem."

"Really? Those people are also submerged in the game. They just haven't found each other."

"Am I also submerged in it?"

This was obviously unusual. Besides, this was exactly the situation that Eri had wanted to be in with such high anticipation. Why didn't she think in that direction? Felli sighed with suspicion.

(Well, it'd be troublesome if she starts dancing in joy.)

Not wanting to see an Eri shouting happily "the ghost has finally come!", Felli began to think of something else. Have they all

been kidnapped? In this place? All of them? That's unrealistic. Is there a murderer with a psychological problem? So stupid. Or maybe we've been lied to. Maybe there's only the two of us here?

That was the most realistic but cheapest possibility. If the club would get Vance to help for such a boring prank, Felli would have to change the way she viewed him. For the man whose only good point was being punctilious, he was also the most foolish.

"To leave the girls in such a dangerous place, how does he plan to go on if it became a problem of responsibility?" Felli said to herself and bent down to snatch out the Dite from the weapon harness tied to her thigh, hidden beneath her skirt. She wasn't permitted to carry her Dite with her. Almost all Military Artists obeyed the school rule. If she was found out, she wouldn't escape punishment even though she was the Student President's sister.

She snatched it out and restored it to spread the flakes around.

Numerous scale-like flakes spread out from the staff shaped Dite and flew away like drifting petals.

"Woah....."

The power of Psychokinesis shone a pale blue in the dark. Eri sighed.

"Incredible."

Ignoring the Eri who still hadn't noticed she was the target of a prank, Felli began to search for other people.

The inside of the building was very spacious. The Alchemy building was built to withstand all kinds of experiments. Felli was suspicious of the cause that could damage the building to such a level. Though the paint on the wall was peeling off, the long abandoned walls showed no signs of rot. This was the same outside or inside the building. Materials strong enough to resist any kind of destructive power must have been used to be able to tolerate pressure, explosion, and heat that was created directly or indirectly. This meant even Psychokinesis had trouble passing through this material. The difficult investigation made Felli frown as she checked the underground carefully. She had finished checking the outside and had found a few people, but the main suspects, the club president and Vance, were nowhere to be seen. This meant they must still be inside the building.

(Perhaps they're hiding somewhere and monitoring me.)

But she had yet to find them.

"Really, what a waste of time....." she complained subconsciously.

At this time.

"Huh?"

Her Psychokinesis captured an unexpected wail.

Whose voice was that? She matched the voice to her memory. A female, and she wasn't the club president. It matched one of the voices in the crowd during the gathering. The real wailing did not

come physically through to Felli's ears. She heard a strong echo. If there was glass in the corridor, the sound should spread to the outside of the building and not cause the glass to resonate. But Felli felt the voice echoing in a place similar to a corridor. The sound was located quite a distance from the flake that was in one of the floors.

"Underground?"

The map hadn't indicated a passage leading to the underground . Still, it wasn't surprising if there was an underground area. Where did the voice leak from? Felli sent her flake over to search for the source of the voice.

Found it. A set of stairs leading to the underground hid in the staircase of the first floor. The floor was opened like a trapdoor. The voice must have come from there. Surrounding the stair was dust and leftovers of something. Who did it? Who pushed apart the things behind the stairs and opened the door?

Something might have happened. Felli couldn't believe the impulse she felt to head for the underground area. She never thought she had an ounce of righteousness or justice in her. This must be Nina's influence.

(How troublesome.)

She complained, not at all preventing her body from moving.

"Eri-san, we're going down," she said. "".....Eh?"

Eri had disappeared. She was nowhere to be seen in the corridor.

"Eri-san?" Felli called loudly, but her voice only echoed in the empty corridor. "What bad timing!"

Did she run away? To where? Did she find something strange that interested her? Felli curled her tongue grudgingly and recalled several flakes to search for Eri. She ran for the stairs beneath the staircase of the first floor.

Felli herself did not possess the fighting strength to match a Military Artist so she had to make detailed preparations before entering a possible battle zone. Underestimation was taboo for anyone. It was especially poisonous for Psychokinesists. Any error on Psychokinesis might bring about the death of a Military Artist who relied on the Psychokinesis in the fight.

The image of the first flake enlarged in Felli's brain as she ran. The air was heavier than the area she was in now, and in the dimness existed a thing that exuded light. It was the trace of Kei light. A Military Artist. Felli didn't have to think more. Vance must be fighting someone.

She sent the flake closer and it captured Vance's figure. Kei ran on the broken wall. It appeared Vance had not jumped out but was sent flying. One of his knees touched the floor and he pushed himself up with his rodlike weapon. Felli checked his surroundings with the flake..... No one was around.

"Vance, stand down."

Her voice sounded from the flake. Her other flakes flew out of the hole that Vance's body had made. Psychokinetic mines. Intense light dominated the area as explosions reverberated.

Vance escaped from the explosions. While he ran out as if leading the smoke billowing out behind him, Felli reached the first floor.

"Don't forget to add senpai behind the name," Vance said, covered by white dust.

Felli was shocked at his first words right after his escape. "As a member of the Student Council, how do you explain playing a prank on girls in such a dangerous place?"

His expression was bitter and sour. "As I said, I....." he muttered.

"What's going on?"

She had set up new flakes at the explosion point as she investigated the surroundings and voiced her question.

"Just what were you fighting?"

Her flake did not catch anything after the explosions. Actually, she hadn't caught anything since she started using Psychokinesis in this building. Vance fought in a place empty of people and he flew out, breaking a hole in the wall all by himself.

"What did you say?" he looked at her strangely. "Didn't your flake sense it? Is that really....." he said to himself, making a conclusion in his mind.

"What are you saying? Eri-san's gone. Where are the others? Do they know?"

Vance lifted his head with shock on his face. "Even she's gone? Impossible. Her personality should be okay."

"What?"

"Damn, something really isn't right."

"Hey..... Isn't that enough," she quietly stared at him. He sighed .

"I know. I'll give you an explanation."

Unbelievable.

"Do you think I'd believe that?" she watched him coldly.

Vance was sitting on the stair. "If it were the usual, you'd believe it, but this time, it's different. Something bad is happening. "

"Bad?"

"If I knew, I wouldn't be working so hard," he shook his head tiredly.

What do believe in? The president of the Horror Lover club was a girl named Ira Roshirinia. Very few people knew she was also a member of the Student Council. Her duty was to look after this old Alchemy building.

This building wasn't simply abandoned.

Thirty years ago when the Academy City Alliance people were still in Zuellni, the students of the Alchemy course had undertaken an experiment under their guidance.

The Guardian Beast plan.

At that time, filth monsters that were far more powerful than Military Artists had invaded the inner parts of the city. Even though they were beaten back, they had caused heavy damages to the city. Besides, Military Artists had suffered death and injuries after the filth monster invasion. After that, Zuellni began planning for ways to defend against filth monsters, and that was the Guardian Beast Plan. The Alchemy biological department had created some monsters through gene technology. Made from the basis of dead parasites, these monsters would invade a filth monster and destroy its soft inside as a self-exploded weapon.

But there was a problem. How were they to make it so the parasite only unleashed its madness on filth monsters? In the end, this problem was never solved.

"The original suggestion was to allow Psychokinesists to control them, but that never took place as it didn't work well."

Though one could control it by burying a flake in the parasite's brain and stimulating it through electricity, this was highly developed technology that Psychokinesists could not control through short training. Besides, the technology itself had yet to be realized. The suggestion was abandoned.

"They used other ways in the end but the experiment was stopped because of the explosion. Not only that, the Guardian Beasts had gone on a rampage afterwards, so they halted the plan."

The top had decided to abandon the experiment facility under a sealed circumstance. The entire building had not been demolished but was abandoned. This had also transformed into the driving force behind Zuellni's student rule.

"What is her mission?"

Felli meant the president of the Horror Lover club – Ira.

"She's like a shadow Military Artist, suppressing the curious glances of the crowd and preventing them from getting close."

A tree had to hide within a forest. Ira's job was to use certain things to create an interest and satisfy that interest on a certain level. The Horror Lover club worked to filter the students. This was something difficult for one to accept over a short period of time.

"Then what's the purpose of this activity? Where are the others? "

Even now, Felli's flake was searching for Eri and everyone. No one had escaped the building, and no one had shown in the place of Vance's fight. Though Vance's words were hard to accept, it was true that Felli knew nothing of anything.

"Then....." Vance opened his mouth and stood.

The flake did not capture anything before him.

"How....."

But why was a monster here? A strange monster was walking in the corridor. It was strange, its body height about the same as Vance's. Its body bent, delicate and slim like Felli's wrist. A ball shaped eye protruded from its head. Its huge mouth was like a line . The body cover had neither scales nor shell. Its wet body reflected the light of Psychokinesis revoltingly.

Though the multi-eye, exclusive to bugs, could not feel people's gazes, the icy pressure assaulted Felli and Vance.

"This is....."

Filth monster. That term flashed across Felli's mind, but a filth monster could not have escaped her Psychokinesis. Then this is..... If Vance's words are true.....

"Guardian Beast? It's still alive?"

Vance tightened his grip on the weapon and quickly moved to stand before her.

"I'll buy some time. Hurry and call for reinforcements."

Felli carefully retreated as she sent a out a flake.

The monster moved.

Vance roared and stepped up to meet its attack. The flow of his Kei made the dry leaves and dust around him float off the floor. The storm of Kei tore the dry leaves apart and pounded them into powder to dance in Vance's surrounding.

The huge staff danced fiercely in the corridor and swung at the monster's speedy long legs. However, the monster stopped suddenly. Vance didn't anticipate that move, and his staff hit the floor before the monster.

"Tsk," he quickly moved away.

The monster's front leg was gone the next moment.

"Woah!"

Vance's body was bounced higher and he was then tossed with his back facing the floor. Next came the sound of a mountain collapsing. The monster's leg beat Vance's body like a whip. Unlike insects, this was a joint supported by muscles like a snake.

"Damn, you're just a bug but you got good eyesight."

Vance didn't look injured. He stood back up. The monster didn't move as if it knew Vance wasn't dead. It probably wouldn't deal the final blow as long as the opponent was still moving.

"This is difficult."

No matter what its real body was, the monster could match the speed of any Military Artist, and it also had a brain for strategies. Though it wasn't enough to defeat Vance, the top in the Military Arts course, it could make this fight difficult.

Vance leaped for the monster and used his staff to fend off the attack of the front leg. Taking advantage of technique that did not seem to match his body height, he slid to the front of the monster.

He stabbed. Wind accompanied the stab that only cut through air as the monster evaded just in time. Vance kept moving, not giving the opponent any time to rest. The monster continued to back off with its long legs in incredible speed. A distance drew between Vance and Felli.

"What!" Vance suddenly shouted in surprise and stopped.

"Oh no!"

She couldn't tell Vance's situation through Psychokinesis, but the moonlight shining through the window showed Vance's figure .

"..... Thread?"

That monster seemed to possess the ability of a spider. Moonlight showed threads weaving around Vance's body. The monster was releasing threads, laying a trap as it retreated.

It now closed in on Vance, planning to eat him. Noticing its intention, Felli used the Psychokinesis mine. She exploded them on any surface area of the monster that was exposed.

A mad storm swept through the corridor. White light conquered the area. As the dust and smoke parted, a large figure appeared before her.

"Couldn't you have saved me more gently?"

Reproachful gaze came from the rough countenance that was stuck with dust.

"Nope."

She had already detonated the mine to minimize Vance's injuries, and she had calculated so the explosion would not spread

to her. Other than that, it'd be hard to satisfy more difficult demands.

"Did this monster kidnap everyone else?"

"..... Yes."

The threads had lost their function after absorbing the heat of the explosion. Vance stood up and waited for the dust to dissipate.

"Those threads have taken everyone. I escaped it as I just finished the work. Everyone else has been taken."

The dust parted, but the monster was gone.

Vance bit his tongue. "It's always like that, retreating after attacking. It must be waiting for our weakness to show."

"But how can a self-destructing weapon hold such a function?"

"I've read the manual. That function was made to save those who couldn't escape in time."

"What terrible taste," she burst out, thinking of the threads weaved around her.

"If that's the case, the other people should be safe for now."

"Aa, it didn't have the time to eat them."

Felli frowned, thinking. The way this monster fought drew out the battle. The sealed off space was advantageous for Felli and

Vance, and they could leave the building to call for reinforcement. But if they let their guard down for those two factors, the situation for the captives would worsen.

"We must act."

Not only for the disappeared students, but she must also stay alert.

"Yeah," Vance nodded. "But how do we find them?"

For some reason, Psychokinesis did not work on the monster. Since they couldn't search for its whereabouts, they could set a trap and lure it in. Though Psychokinetic mines worked to a certain degree, that monster's body could probably resist it better than they had imagined.

"Worst comes to worst, we'll have to destroy the building."

Vance agreed. "Even if we can't save the captives."

"First, let's search for its nest."

They moved.

If they acted separately, they might fall one after another, particularly Felli. Using the mines in a critical moment was not enough.

The two of them ran to the underground area.

Felli had searched the areas above ground, including the places she and Eri had gone to, leaving this area as the only place they had yet to investigate. The device to seal off the Guardian Beasts must be there too. Who knew whether the device had fallen into disrepair through time or through other reasons, the seal had been released and the Guardian Beasts started moving again.

Why did the people not completely destroy the place? It was probably useless to ask that question.

"Let's go," Vance took the lead, carefully walking deeper into the gloom.

Felli held his torch. The light shone a circle in the dark. They walked as the flake flew before them.

"Have you contacted the outside?" Vance asked to ease the heavy atmosphere. Felli shook her head.

If she had to concentrate on controlling the flakes, they could move faster, but the monster had prevented her from doing so. The speed of the flakes had slowed down.

"There isn't anyone in the Student Council building. Anyway, we've sent a flake to the police, then....."

She had sent the other one to the Mechanical Department. If she remembered it right, Layfon and Nina were working there. If she could contact Layfon, she could obtain a very reliable support.

Vance snorted in disapproval. "It really irks me to have to rely on him all the time."

"That's the reality."

"If this keeps on, we'll become a rubbish organization that can't do anything without him."

Vance's words were not entirely irrational. Besides, it hurt Felli to have to contact Layfon when he desired to leave the path of a Military Artist.

"Aa, really. Why did it become like this?" she burst out. The tension of the incapacitated Psychokinesis had put pressure on her. She probably wanted to rest psychologically.

Vance changed the topic having heard her sigh. "Your brother has his own considerations."

He immediately knew she was sighing about being transferred to Military Arts.

"That guy's always been thinking for you through his own way. "

"What way?"

This was what she wanted to ask but couldn't.

"You have talent. You can be called a genius, but you rely on your talent and have not put any effort into it. You don't know what hard work is."

"....."

His intense words made her speechless.

"You didn't even spend any effort on searching for a path besides Psychokinesist. As you lived in a rich family when you were young, you don't know what hard work is in life. You don't know the pain of failure. To him, it's not possible to let you live in the outside world."

"You wouldn't know if you don't try, isn't it?"

"What have you done so far?"

"....."

Similarly as before, she had no defense. She had been in Zuellni for two years and she had only done some part time work once.

"If you were serious, he probably wouldn't say much. Either way, he'll be leaving next year. The person and things that bound you will disappear. He's been preparing for that."

"..... Doing something unnecessary," she complained lightly.

"Well, it really is..... Difficult to transfer you out of Military Arts at this time."

Vance's breath changed, and Felli's mood also changed.

The breathing of the monster came from the deeper part of the corridor. It was a sound they had not heard of before. It must be excited.

They were close to the destination.

Felli's flake moved at high speed as it investigated.

Found it.

"Found it."

There was more space beneath them. The large hole was punched through the ground after the explosion. This space had appeared after the building was abandoned. All the people that were taken were bounded in this space. There were no signs of struggle. They had all lost their energy. Felli was released as she confirmed they were still alive.

"Very good. All that's left is to defeat this guy."

Luck persisted..... No, the situation had turned for better. The two of them had discovered Felli's flake at the Mechanical Department.

"What's happened?" Nina asked in shock. Felli relayed the event .

"Psychokinesis doesn't work on that monster? Isn't it a filth monster?"

She briefly explained the origin of the monster.

"There was such a plan....." Layfon said.

"All right, we'll head over immediately."

Nina's voice drowned out Layfon's. This was the first time Felli thought the Captain's voice was so reliable, probably because Layfon was around.

"Wait a moment," he stopped her.

"What?"

Layfon ignored her and spoke to the flake. "I'm afraid it'll be too late even if we head over now."

His voice echoed emotionlessly around them. Felli was silent as her body trembled.

"What're you saying?"

"The battle's begun, right? Looking at the location, it wouldn't allow anyone to retreat. All that's left is whether Vance can win or not."

His faint voice made Nina breathe in deeply.

"If you want to turn the situation around, then Felli..... senpai has to join in the fight."

She didn't know what to do.

"Me? But I'm only responsible for processing information....."

"It's not that you can't fight. You can only attack. Either way, you can't just observe from the side."

Layfon and Nina had left the Mechanical Department and were heading over with all their strength. He urged Felli to take action. But, what should she do.....

"..... This is like food storage for it, isn't it?" Nina suddenly began to confirm the situation.

"Yes."

"Then there are ways. This isn't as difficult as it seems."

Felli quietly listened to her words.

Vance had entered a fight with the monster. Felli communicated with Layfon, Nina and the Police at a distance. The strategy Nina had set down was for Felli to act on, not Vance. If she were to tell Vance, the opponent might notice their strategy, so Felli could only wait for the chance to reveal itself.

That was all she could do, to fight as a Psychokinesist whose usual responsibility was to process information and support from behind.

(Really.....)

This was her first time. A Psychokinesist's physical attack was only the use of the Psychokinetic mine. Though the destructive power wasn't high, it was enough to buy some time. But even that power was so little, she could only use it.

(Really.)

She repeated the word.

And the chance came.

"Ohhhhhhhh!"

The monster began to take evasive measures under Vance's fierce attack. A straight line appeared between Felli and the nest.

(Good.)

She ran. Her speed wasn't as high as an average Military Artist, but it matched that of an elite normal person. The monster noticed her after a little while. It howled and channeled all its hostility to her. No longer avoiding Vance's attack, it rushed for her. Vance's staff had only broken a number of the monster's feet, but the monster showed no signs of stopping.

Felli looked over her shoulder and saw the monster right after her.

Her foot slipped and she fell on the sand-filled floor. Though she had scratched her knees, she had no time to moan.

The monster was right behind. Its agile movement beyond reality did not match its huge body. It jumped as if it had lost its balance.

(Really.)

She repeated. What joke was this? She had come to a boring place where ghosts existed, and in the end, she met the dead. This was beyond a joke.

The monster was close and it knew she didn't have resisting strength like Vance. Its movements showed its boldness as it opened its large mouth. She could clearly see the dense teeth in that mouth. Saliva drooped from it. Just thinking of herself being torn apart made her tremble.

The being of death was before her.

Is this it..... she thought.

This was Layfon's experience in battle. As a Psychokinesis who always stood at the back, she never understood the tension that dominated her entire body, the burgeoning of the brain, the tearing of the heart, the numbness that spread out from her back.

Even so, her body moved. She had finished the preparation before she moved.

Her mission was to lure it here.

Do it.

An intense light suffused the ceiling. The mine of Psychokinesis. The sound of explosion hammer her eardrums as fierce wind blew her light body into the air. The pressure of the explosion assaulted the monster and pressed it down onto the floor..... And then the ceiling collapsed. The debris of the first floor buried the monster.

It was easy for Vance to deal the immobile Guardian Beast a final blow.

The red light of the ambulance painted the forest. The students rescued from the old Alchemy building were carried to the ambulance. Felli watched them tiredly from a side. The Police had searched the place thoroughly afterwards but did not find any more Guardian Beasts. What was left was a huge formation of glass containers. One of them was broken and the liquid left in its inside was dyed a suspicious color. They couldn't believe they were still alive. As this was the result of being abandoned for thirty years, who knew whether the one alive was lucky?

The loneliness of words she couldn't say, "how should we catch it?" filled Felli. Perhaps, she was exhausted from being released from the tension in her. In there....

"Huh, what happened to everyone?"

Felli's eyes widened.

"Eri-san?"

Eri walked over with suspicion, not knowing what had happened. Unbelievable.

"Why did you.....?"

She turned around in a fluster and saw the students bounded by threads were being carried on stretchers. She thought Eri was one of them, but she then remembered Vance's words.

"Though that girl really likes strange creatures, her reactions tend to diminish when she really meets one. With her around, the probability of meeting one is strangely high. That's why Ira used her to find the entrance to the sealed off area that has disappeared off the record. She did it by applying as a Student Council member . So I joined her."

Felli watched her as she recalled Vance's words.

"Where did you go?"

"Eh? Did I not tell you that I found a little girl who got lost? So I led her out."

She had no recollection of it. Speaking of which, all of her attention was on the flake when Eri disappeared. Was that why she didn't hear her?

"Where's that girl?"

"Well..... She was gone once I left the building, then I went to search for her. But I couldn't do much alone, so I came back for help."

Ahah..... Felli watched the sky.

A girl in the building? In this night, in this ruin, in this Academy City? Though there were kids in Zuellni who hadn't reached the age to enroll in the Academy City, but the probability of such a young child coming to this sort of place was very low..... Yes, wasn't that lower than the probability of meeting a ghost?

"Did you really not see it?"

"What do you mean?" Eri said, but she recovered quickly.

"Well, it's good that nothing's happened."

Felli's friend was safe.

And.....

"Felli-senpai!"

Nothing else mattered when she saw Layfon running over with all his might despite the cold words he uttered through the flake. Anyway, things had safely ended. That was what Felli thought.